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The Rise of the Goddess in the Hindu Tradition

Tracy Pintchman

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Front cover: *Painting of Durga Slaying the Demon Mahisa*, miniature painting, India 1800-1825, artist unknown.
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*For My Parents,
Mildred and Charles Pintchman*

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Introduction

Setting the Stage

Scholars studying the religions of India have long been intrigued by the important roles that goddesses and goddess worship play in diverse strands of the Hindu tradition. Although the centrality of female divinities and their worship in India is asserted most vigorously in Tantric and non-Brahmanical Sakta traditions, which reject the claims of Brahmanical authority, the various formulations of goddesses and conceptions pertaining to goddesses in Brahmanical Hinduism are nevertheless of particular interest due to the hegemony of Brahmanical discourse and its pan-Indian appeal.

For the last 2500 years, the Indian subcontinent has been peppered with numerous religious and spiritual tendencies, movements, and groups that have often upheld competing beliefs and practices. Divergences among these groups have been dictated by social, political, historical, and geographical factors as well as ideological differences. The diversity of religious life on the subcontinent has led many scholars to reject the notion that there is any real entity that can be referred to generally as "Hinduism" or the "Hindu Tradition." Rather, scholars argue, what exists is essentially a loosely constructed web of disparate religious, social, and

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political threads that may or may not be related and may or may not intersect. Yet despite this enormous variety, forces that pervade many of the disparate elements constituting Indian spirituality and provide broad and encompassing orientations are nonetheless present in India. One of the most important such unifying forces is the Brahmanical tradition, which is considered by many to be central and authoritative.

Brahmanical Hinduism upholds itself as the orthodox standard against which all other traditions and orientations are measured; those that accept its authority are embraced, whereas those that do not are rejected. The status of the Brahmanical tradition transcends cultural and geographic boundaries and is understood throughout the various regions of the Asian subcontinent. Sanskrit, the language in which the texts of the Brahmanical tradition are recorded, is studied by Brahmins from Kashmir to Kerala, as are the various texts that constitute the Brahmanical Sanskrit canon. The influence of Brahmanical Hinduism is pervasive and touches a wide variety of religious phenomena all over the subcontinent. Given the status of the Brahmanical tradition, it is important to explore the ways in which it represents female divinity in order to understand what is one of the most pervasive and authoritative formulations of the feminine in Hindu India.

The Brahmanical tradition proposes the existence of a Great Goddess. Different texts present this Goddess in different ways and ascribe to her an enormous variety of identities and traits. Despite this diversity, there are nonetheless discernible patterns underlying many of the disparate elements. On the most abstract level the Great Goddess is identified with principles that are impersonal and cosmic, transcending all particularities. In short, she is represented as both materiality, usually designated in post-Vedic texts by the term *prakṛti*, and a principle of energy, usually designated by the term *śakti*. The principles with which the Goddess is equated are embodied on the divine level in

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different individual goddesses, who are also said to be the multifarious expressions of the Great Goddess, and on the human level in the essential nature of women. The category "feminine" or "femaleness" encompasses all of these levels.

The term *prakṛti* has several meanings, including "original or primary substance," "nature, character," "fundamental form, pattern, standard," "the original producer of the material world, Nature," and "a goddess, the personified will of the Supreme in the creation." 1 Thomas Coburn observes that the best way to circumscribe the primary meanings of the term is to describe it as "a word that has been used to designate the material world in varying relationships to the divine." 2 *Prakṛti* refers to an abstract, cosmic principle of materiality as well as manifest matter itself. The term *śakti*, from √*sak*, "to be able," means "power," "ability," "strength," "energy," and so forth. 3 The term *śakti* often denotes a cosmic principle of energy that is described as the active dimension of Brahman, the Absolute. As a cosmic principle, *śakti* both causes creation to come into existence and sustains it.

The presentation of the Goddess as both *prakṛti* and *Śakti* implies that underlying the Brahmanical Hindu understanding of the feminine is some deeper connection between the two. There is in fact yet another principle, *maya*, that serves to

link them. The term *maya* comes from *√ma*, "to measure," and can denote Brahman's creative yet delusive power or the material form that results from the activation of such a power. As the first, *maya* is often equated with *sakti*; as the second, with *prakṛti*. Like the other two, *maya* is often understood to be a cosmic feminine principle, and the use of the term tends to stress the illusory, impermanent, and/or changeable nature of creation in relation to the fully real, eternal, and unchanging nature of the Absolute.

Many scholars have noted the associations between some or all of these principles and female gender in Hindu thought in different contexts. Susan S. Wadley, for example,

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asserts that in the Hindu tradition "The female is first of all *sakti* (energy/power), the energizing principle of the universe. The female is also *prakṛti* (Nature)the undifferentiated Matter of the universe." 4 Wadley touches upon the link between *sakti/prakṛti* and female gender in mythico-religious and philosophical contexts, but her main concern is the way in which the association of these principles with femaleness is reflected on the social level in the expectations established for the behavior of women. David Kinsley briefly discusses these three principles in relation to the goddess Kali in particular and to the Hindu Great Goddess in general. P. G. Layle looks at the way in which these and other terms are used as epithets of the Goddess in the Devi-Bhagavata Purana, and Coburn does the same with respect to the Devi-Mahatmya.⁵ None of these scholars, however, has explored the origins and nature of this symbolic complex across a wide range of scriptures.

The development of these various principles in Brahmanical Hinduism and their association with female gender can be traced historically through the various layers of Brahmanical texts. In the earliest scriptures of the Brahmanical tradition, the Vedas (ca. 1500 B. C. E. -ca. 300 B. C. E.), different goddesses are linked with materiality and/or power but not in a systematic or normative manner. Rather, there are several narrative and speculative strands that adumbrate such associations but do not articulate them clearly or directly. In the post-Vedic era up to the end of the classical period in India (ca. 300 B. C. E. -ca. sixth century C. E.), we find an increasing preoccupation with systematic formulations of beliefs and increasingly standardized articulations of cosmic structures and processes as distinct philosophical schools emerge. In this period, a normative conception of the meaning of the term *prakṛti* emerges within the context of Sāṃkhya philosophy. An understanding of *sakti* as a cosmic power also begins to emerge, although the most elaborate formulation of this notion is fully articulated only in the ninth century and later, when Tantric literature begins to

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appear. 6 The concept of *maya*, too, begins to come into its own. These three principles are not identified with any particular goddess or goddesses during this period; in fact, they are not even necessarily conceived to be female in gender.

Toward the end of the classical period and in the postclassical and medieval periods (ca. fifth/sixth century C. E. - sixteenth century C. E.) different conceptual and mythological threads are woven together in the Puranas, and there emerges a notion of a Great Goddess, Devi (Goddess) or Mahadevi (Great Goddess), who is consistently identified as *prakṛti*, *sakti*, and *maya*. The symbolic complex that is formulated in these texts participates in the medieval Brahmanical tendency to synthesize divergent elements and represents the confluence of various streams of thought already present in diverse conceptual and narrative environments. Vedic narrative themes in which different goddesses are associated with matter and energy come together with systematic formulations of the principles *prakṛti*, *sakti*, and *maya* in later literature, and a new narrative emerges.

This study fills a gap in the available scholarly literature on the Goddess by exploring the rise of the Great Goddess historically in relation to these three cosmic principles and the ways in which the Goddess is formulated and elevated in Brahmanical Hindu discourse from Vedic times to the late Puranic period. There are five main purposes of this study: (1) to trace the origins and development within the Vedic-Brahmanical tradition of motifs that associate goddesses with materiality and power; (2) to examine the formulation of the principles *prakṛti*, *sakti*, and *maya* individually; (3) to illuminate the development of the mutual association of all these elements; (4) to explore the resulting formulation of a Great Goddess characterized specifically as *prakṛti*, *sakti*, and *maya*; and (5) to probe the cultural implications of this

material with respect to gender issues.

We have referred to these principles as "cosmic, " but it may not be clear what is meant by this term. *Prakrti, sakti,*

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and *maya* are often portrayed as cosmological principles, that is, structures inherent within creation. But they are also essentially cosmogonic, and they play key roles in the many accounts of creation found throughout the various scriptures constituting the Brahmanical Sanskrit canon. ⁷ One finds some of the richest descriptions of the nature and function of *prakrti, sakti,* and *maya* in the context of these creation accounts. It is in this context also that we often see the assimilation of these principles to one or more goddesses. Apart from the cosmogonic accounts, descriptions of cosmology that mention these principles usually offer rather thin descriptions of their nature and often appear to assume that their cosmogonic functions are understood. This study, then, will focus somewhat heavily on cosmogonies not by design but simply because much of the relevant data is found in the accounts of creation that appear throughout the various texts that constitute the Brahmanical canon.

Apart from questions of data, however, detailing the mechanisms of cosmogony and the resulting cosmology appears to be one of the central concerns of the tradition. Much attention is given to these topics, and one finds a great number and variety of cosmogonic hypotheses and narrative accounts across a broad range of different Brahmanical philosophical and mythological texts. One of the primary reasons for this emphasis on reflection about cosmic processes may be that cosmogony and cosmology in and of themselves are rich and meaningful categories. Cosmogonies describe fundamental categories and forces that are assumed to shape creation; these then help determine the essential nature of the universe, its structure, and the laws that govern it. In proposing to articulate truths about the world, descriptions of cosmogony and cosmology detail the confines within which it is assumed that humans as well as other kinds of beings must function. The centrality of our three principles and the Goddess with whom they are identified in descriptions of cosmogony and cosmology

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indicates their fundamental importance in Brahmanical Hindu conceptions about reality.

Since the symbolic complex that this study explores is largely related to issues of cosmogony and cosmology, we will focus only on those aspects and functions of the Great Goddess that are most clearly and directly related to such issues. Some may object that the present study does not pay enough attention to the Goddess's important soteriological functions. The Goddess's role as the dispeller of illusion who helps one achieve liberation (*moksa*) is indeed fundamental to her identity. Yet this role is essentially epistemological, for in such contexts the Goddess's salvific power is related to her identity with spiritual knowledge (*vidya*) or her ability to grant or lead one to such knowledge. The principles with which this study is concerned, on the other hand, are not primarily epistemological but are, generally speaking, ontological; that is, they are structures that are portrayed as structures of being, not knowing. This study will therefore address the soteriological functions of the

Goddess only when they are relevant to the project at hand. It is also important to note that all three of the terms that we will explore *prakrti, sakti,* and *maya* are grammatically feminine terms. One might argue, therefore, that the association of these principles with female gender rather than male gender is rooted in their linguistic valence. It is evident, however, that no matter what the origin of the association of these principles with femaleness, they are identified clearly in the Puranas as feminine not only in their grammatical values but in their very essences. The gender-specific nature of these principles is important, for it may have implications with respect to the treatment of women in Indian society, as we shall see.

Textual Issues

Underlying the structure of this study are also several theoretical and historical presuppositions regarding the nature

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of Brahmanical scripture in the Indian environment that inform not only the approach that is used but also the formulation of the central problem itself. The Brahmanical Hindu tradition makes a distinction between texts that are considered orthodox (*astika*), and are thus accepted as scripture by the Brahmanical tradition, and those that are considered heterodox (*nastika*). The orthodox Brahmanical tradition includes the Vedic texts, Dharma-Sastras (legal codes), epics (Mahabharata and Ramayana), Darsanas (philosophical systems), and Puranas (mythological compilations). As the Dharma-Sastras treat mainly legal and social matters and thus contain little cosmogonic or cosmological material, the present study does not treat them in great detail. The Ramayana, one of the two great epics of ancient India, also contains little material relevant to the subject at hand. 8

The Vedas represent the earliest and most symbolically important layer of the orthodox Brahmanical canon. There are four main classes or genres of Vedic literature that emerge in more or less chronological order: Samhitas (ca. 1500-800 B. C. E.), Brahmanas (ca. 1100-800 B. C. E.), Aranyakas (ca. 1100-800 B. C. E.), and Upanisads (ca. 800-300 B. C. E.). There are four Samhitas Rg, Yajur, Sama, and Atharvaeach of which is associated with a different school. The many different Brahmanas, Aranyakas, and Upanisads are all based on one of the four schools of the Samhitas. The term "Veda" in its most limited sense designates the four Vedic Samhitas or the four Samhitas along with the Brahmanas, Aranyakas, and Upanisads associated with them.

The Vedic Samhitas are largely Aryan in origin, and much of their content was probably brought into India by invading Indo-European tribes during the middle of the second millennium B. C. E. Each of the four Vedic Samhitas has contents and concerns that differ from those of the other Samhitas. The Rg-Veda Samhita is a collection of hymns (*rcs*) to different gods and goddesses and contains a great deal of important mythological material. The Sama-Veda Samhita, which is a collection of chants (*samans*), is based

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largely on Rg-Vedic materials. The Yajur-Veda Samhita is composed mainly of prayers and sacrificial formulas (*yajuses*) and has been handed down in two basic forms, black (*krsna*) and white (*sukla*). The black Yajur-Veda Samhita has four different recensions, the most important of which is the Taittiriya Samhita. All of the recensions of the black Yajur-Veda contain explanations and discussions of the sacrificial rites to which the different formulas belong, whereas the white Yajur-Veda Samhita does not. Finally, the Atharva-Veda Samhita contains mostly charms and spells. 9 Later genres of Vedic literature also have distinct orientations. The many different Brahmanas largely provide the instructions for Vedic sacrifice, explain its meaning, and reflect on its larger significance. The Aranyakas focus on the more esoteric significance of Vedic ritual. Finally, the Upanisads develop further the reflective tendencies of the Brahmanas and Aranyakas and give them independent expression apart from ritual concerns.

Although the earliest portions of the Vedas appear to be relatively free from the influence of the indigenous Indian cultures, the impact of these cultures becomes increasingly evident in the later portions of the Vedas. Thus, by the time of the Upanisads, the influence on the Aryan tradition of various ascetic and meditative groups generally held by most scholars to be indigenous to Indiaas well as the contemplative and philosophical orientations of these groupsis quite apparent. As the Aryan and non-Aryan strands of the tradition continue to intermingle during the post-Vedic period, different philosophical systems come to be formulated systematically. Those that are welcomed by the orthodox tradition accept the validity and authority of the Vedas. Eventually, six different systems emerge: Nyaya, Vaisesika, Purva-Mimamsa, Vedanta, Samkhya, and Yoga. While the philosophical systems express the tradition's reflective tendencies in the post-Vedic period, its narrative dimensions are given expression in the epics (ca. 400 B. C. E. -400 C. E.) and Puranas (ca. 200-300 C. E. and later).

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There is a remarkable amount of borrowing and sharing of elements in the post-Vedic Brahmanical tradition, both from genre to genre and from period to period. Thus we find, for example, long discourses in the epics and Puranas that pertain to the authority of the Vedic tradition or others that are clearly influenced by the concerns of various Brahmanical philosophical schools. There are at least two factors that contribute to this kind of phenomenon. First, canonical texts

recorded in written form in later centuries borrowed heavily from their predecessors. Second, what eventually came to be recorded in written documents was developed, elaborated, and maintained in a strictly oral medium for many centuries before being committed to writing. 10

Both the Vedas and post-Vedic Brahmanical texts were originally oral, not written. With respect to the Vedas, writing was felt to be polluting and was thus an improper medium for the transmission of such sacred scriptures. Yet the Vedas represent a fixed canon and are meant to be maintained in a strictly unaltered form. The orality of the Vedic tradition therefore does not lend itself to any kind of variation or recombination. The strictness with which the exact structure of the Vedas is meant to be preserved is due at least in part to the efficacy attributed to the sound-values of the Vedas; the sounds themselves are felt to be constitutive of reality, and precise recitation of these sounds contributes to the maintenance of the existing cosmic order. Any alteration in the recitation of the Vedic utterances would therefore have cosmic ramifications.¹¹ Post-Vedic texts, like the Vedas, were also originally oral, yet the post-Vedic tradition is alterable and allows for human elaboration.¹² It appears that a great deal of what was eventually systematized and recorded in post-Vedic Brahmanical documents thus found its way into diverse environments in a variety of forms.

The influence of such borrowing and sharing of elements is most conspicuous in the Puranas, which draw in materials from a wide variety of systems and ages. C. Mackenzie

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Brown has noted that the Puranas are essentially assimilative texts to which "much has been added over the millennia, and relatively little has been lost": 13

These Puranic works are rooted in an ancient oral bardic and priestly culture, and even when committed to writing, they continued to interact with the ongoing oral traditions. They were not static texts but remained fluid, continuously expanding, incorporating an ever-increasing body of traditional lore. They thus came to include a vast variety of materials from widely different ages.¹⁴

The Puranas also borrow heavily from one another, and entire sections of one are sometimes found in another in identical or almost identical form. Yet through it all, the Puranas are careful not to lose contact with the essential values of the Vedic-Brahmanical tradition. As Brown also notes, the Puranas are seen not as innovations of the tradition but as elucidations and interpretations of the Vedas. It is their adherence to the ancient traditions that makes them religiously authoritative, since "truth, in the Hindu tradition, is not something so much to be newly discovered as to be recovered."¹⁵

In exploring the history and formation of the canon in the Brahmanical tradition, it is helpful to evoke what many contemporary scholars call "intertextuality," if we understand the term "text" in a broad sense to include both the oral and written dimensions of Brahmanical scripture. Intertextuality indicates that a given text produced in a given culture is always grounded in a textual tradition of which it is aware and of which it is itself a self-conscious product. In other words, texts are highly self-referential and are created largely in response to other texts.

The text is not an autonomous or unified object, but a set of relations with other texts. Its system of language, its grammar, its lexicon, drag along numerous bits and

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piecetracesof history. . . . The "genealogy" of the text is necessarily an incomplete network of conscious and unconscious borrowed fragments. Manifested, tradition is a mess. Every text is an intertext. 16

The term "intertextuality" is often used to describe the repetition from text to text of unarticulated yet formative rules and regulations that determine the general nature of language and textuality in a given tradition. Yet intertextuality also includes the self-conscious adaptation of literary structures and devices found in one text or textual tradition by another text or tradition. In this sense, the notion of intertextuality is helpful in describing the continuity of certain narrative structures and ideas from text to text and in a sense helps explain how tracing the history of an idea is even possible. Such notions are especially applicable to scripture in the orthodox Brahmanical tradition, for the texts constituting the Brahmanical canon are heavily self-referential.¹⁷

This intertextual emphasis reflects in part the importance of scripture as a symbol of authority in Brahmanism. The Brahmanical tradition defines itself in relation to a body of sacred, orally transmitted texts, the Vedas, collectively, the Vedas which are seen to be the unquestionable foundation of the scriptural tradition. Yet, as a number of scholars have emphasized in recent years, the status of the Veda as a symbol of authority has less to do with its contents than one might suspect. J. C. Heesterman, for example, notes that "the high prestige of the Vedas is paralleled by an equally high disregard for its contents." 18 Brian K. Smith also notes the symbolic function of the Veda:

The great paradox of Hinduism . . . is that although the religion is inextricably tied to the legitimizing authority of the Veda, in post-Vedic times the subject matter of the Veda was and is largely unknown by those who define themselves in relation to it. Its contents

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(almost entirely concerning the meaning and performance of sacrificial rituals that Hindus do not perform) are at best reworked (being for example, reconstituted into ritual formulas or mantras for use in Hindu ceremonies), and in many cases appear to be totally irrelevant for Hindu doctrine and practice. . . . Although it appears to be the case that Hindus do acknowledge the absolute authority of the Veda for legitimizing post-Vedic Hindu beliefs and practices, the relationship to the Veda often seems to be, as Renou writes, like "a simple 'raising of the hat' in passing to an idol by which one no longer intends to be encumbered later on." 19

The authoritative status of the Veda is also reflected in Brahmanical Hinduism's traditional designation of the Veda as *sruti*, "that which is heard," or revelation, as opposed to the rest of Brahmanical scripture, which falls under the category of *smṛti*, "that which is remembered," or tradition. *Sruti* is affirmed as having a transcendental, divine, non-human origin, whereas *smṛti* texts can be attributed to personal authorship.²⁰ Some would claim that, as revelation, the Veda is not only scripture but represents the concrete expression of the subtle structures of creation. It is said that the sound-vibrations of creation were seen and heard by ancient seers called *ṛsis* who then sent forth these sounds in their own speech; these sounds became the words of the Vedas. In a recent study, Barbara Holdrege has explored these mechanisms and the larger issues surrounding the cosmological status of the Veda as a transcendent reality represented as eternal, uncreated knowledge that is the essence of ultimate reality and the source and foundation of creation.²¹ The importance of Veda as a symbol of authority in

Brahmanical Hinduism extends not only to the actual Vedic scriptures themselves but also to the entire Brahmanical tradition of scripture. Although the Vedas enjoy special

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status as that in reference to which the Brahmanical tradition defines itself, the Veda becomes a symbol under which the entire orthodox canon can be subsumed. The authority of any text increases when it relates itself to the Vedic tradition. Holdrege notes four ways in which post-Vedic texts assimilate themselves to the Veda and thus participate in its authoritative status: (1) by explicitly claiming the status of Veda, as do the epics and some of the Puranas, which call themselves the fifth Veda; (2) by establishing a genealogy that links the teachings of the given text to the Veda; (3) by claiming that the text's teachings derive from lost Vedic texts; or (4) by otherwise conforming to the paradigm of Veda.²²

It should be emphasized that although the Veda's value as a symbol irrespective of content plays an important role in the tradition, nevertheless its authority also operates to some extent on the level of content as well. Narrative structures and teachings found not only in the Vedas themselves but also in post-Vedic Brahmanical texts are granted authority by virtue of being part of the Vedic tradition; when such structures are then absorbed into subsequently recorded scriptures, they help lend the newer texts an air of authority as well. So, for example, the essential teachings of the orthodox philosophical schools, which accept the authority of the Vedas and thus present themselves as a continuation of the Vedic tradition, also enjoy authoritative status. Because of their status, these teachings are simply accepted as valid and are then absorbed into later Brahmanical discourse without ever being seriously called into question. Both concepts and narratives found in earlier layers of Brahmanical scripture are in fact frequently adopted by later Brahmanical scriptures. The ability of a particular teaching or narrative to help convey authority simply by virtue of its inclusion in a previously existing

authoritative text is probably one of the primary motivating factors behind such borrowings and thus may help contribute to the Vedic-Brahmanical tradition's intertextual richness.

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One must also stress the role in intertextual discourse of not only texts, both oral and written, but also the transmitters of texts. Although we know very little about authorship with respect to Brahmanical scriptures, it is apparent that this genre is more or less the exclusive product of Brahmins who were educated in the tradition of Brahmanical Sanskrit literature. The epics and Puranas contain many strands that are non-Brahmanical in origin, but these strands appear to have been appropriated by Brahmins and reworked to conform at least to some extent to Brahmanical values. The traditional system of Brahmanical education entails the apprenticeship of a Brahmin student to his Brahmin teacher, who educates him in the Brahmanical Sanskrit tradition. In such a context, knowledge of the tradition is the primary sign of scholarly authority. The self-enclosed, elitist system of Sanskritic learning combined with the emphasis on memorizing traditional texts probably reinforces the tendency within Brahmanical Hinduism to invoke earlier narrative structures in subsequent narrations.

Given this general framework, it is not surprising that the presentation of the particular configuration surrounding conceptions of a single Great Goddess that ultimately emerges in the Puranas draws heavily from mythic and philosophical themes found in earlier Brahmanical texts, and its roots can be traced back to Vedic materials. Paradigmatic narrative and conceptual structures, especially with respect to cosmogony, are maintained. This conservative aspect of the development of the Goddess represents the attempt to preserve essential tenets of Brahmanical orthodoxy by utilizing elements that are already present in and accepted by the core tradition.

Despite strong continuities, however, there are also important discontinuities that cannot be ignored. By the time of the Puranas, the influence of non-Brahmanical elements on Brahmanical orthodoxy is highly evident, and outside elements are absorbed more and more into the core tradition. The impulse to revere goddesses very highly, for example,

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seems to represent primarily an originally non-Brahmanical impulse whose influence becomes increasingly apparent in the Puranas. Devotion to a personal god, which is of rather little importance in the Vedic and philosophical traditions, also becomes much more important during the Puranic period and is thus absorbed into Brahmanical values. The conservative tendency to retain orthodox narrative and philosophical structures is challenged by a countervailing tendency to absorb non-orthodox elements into Brahmanical orthodoxy. The older formulations that are incorporated into the Puranic texts are then greatly elaborated or varied to conform to the orientation of the new textual environment.

Summary of the Book

Taking into account these various factors, this study argues that the Great Goddess, like other gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon, develops over time as a result of the blending of Brahmanical and non-Brahmanical religious tendencies and divinities. Yet the essential identity of the Great Goddess as "Great" appears to be constructed at least initially largely in and by the Brahmanical tradition, which provides the context for her definition. The conflation of mythological and philosophical categories that we find in the Puranas provides the framework for the equation of goddesses with principles. Many of the goddesses and stories are not originally Vedic-Brahmanical, but the framework and the principles are both taken straight from the Vedas and the orthodox Brahmanical philosophical systems. The various aspects of the Goddess's identity are then placed in a logical cosmogonic sequence and are viewed as different levels of manifestation of a single, inherently female cosmogonic power. The result is the postulation of a unique, all-encompassing principle that is expressed on different levels of creation in diverse ways but that can be understood theistically as a Great Goddess no matter what the sectarian

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allegiance of the given text. One might even argue that the identity of the Great Goddess as a cosmogonic principle manifest in stages as *sakti*, *maya*, and *prakrti* is in fact not only her defining characteristic, but also the sine qua non of her very existence. It is only through the synthesis of philosophical and mythological cosmogonic categories and structures that diverse notions of female divinity become combined and the notion of a single Great Goddess emerges.

The rise of the Great Goddess in the Brahmanical tradition is probably tied to issues of Brahmanical hegemony. In order to maintain its status and acceptance in and by society at large, the Brahmanical tradition had to incorporate elements from the popular traditions. In the case of the Great Goddess, although the impulse to elevate female divinities to supreme status probably originates primarily from non-orthodox, autochthonous religious systems, as other scholars have argued, the mechanisms by which the feminine principle is elevated in orthodox literature are borrowed from the orthodox tradition itself. Thus Brahmanical orthodoxy is able to maintain its essential authority while adapting itself to suit the changing religious orientation of the population at large.

The first two chapters of this study clarify the historical background from which the relevant associations emerge. Chapter one explores the mythology of the Vedas, in which different goddesses are associated with cosmogonic and cosmological notions of power and materiality, although such associations are not articulated formally. Chapter two turns to the early philosophical schools and explores the relevant philosophical conceptions with respect to systematic formulations of cosmogony and cosmology. This chapter also explores some of the ways in which relevant philosophical and mythological themes come together in certain environments.

The third chapter of this study focuses on the Puranas. In the Puranas, different goddesses come to be identified with

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the cosmogonic and cosmological principles *prakrti*, *sakti*, and *maya*. This chapter examines diverse accounts of creation in several different Puranas and details both the essential cosmogonic patterns that are articulated and the variable elements that are introduced according to the unique perspective of the individual texts. The notion of a Great Goddess who is *prakrti/sakti/maya* emerges in these materials as a synthesis of concepts already present in the different strands of the tradition explored in the first two chapters.

The conclusion summarizes the observations made in this study before exploring the larger implications of the material as a whole and assessing in particular some of the historical, political, and interpretive issues that emerge from the data. Finally, we turn to the social implications of the observations made in this study and explore how structures pertaining to the Goddess may help shape conceptions of female gender, the treatment of women in Hindu society, and the roles that women are assigned. The conclusion argues that the formulation of the Great Goddess may well have implications with respect to notions about gender and gender roles in Hindu society. In Brahmanical Hinduism, femaleness as a category is defined at least in part according to the principles embodied in the Goddess. Although principles in and of themselves are essentially neutral, one can interpret them in various ways. In the Brahmanical tradition, there is a strong tendency to portray *prakrti*, *sakti*, and *maya* on one level as positive and creative yet at the same time inherently ambiguous and potentially dangerous. Therefore, they must be monitored and controlled so that they manifest their positive tendencies rather than their negative ones. Such representations may in fact help support social practices that restrict the choices women, who embody *prakrti*, *sakti*, and *maya*, have.

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Chapter One

The Feminine Principle in the Vedas

Cosmogony, Cosmology, and Goddesses in the Vedas

Our investigation begins with the Vedas. In their portrayals of goddesses, many Vedic passages articulate motifs that help lay the foundation for later formulations of the Great Goddess as *prakrti* and *sakti*. The idea of an abstract female

principle or principles, although not fully articulated, begins to take form in these texts, particularly in Vedic accounts of cosmogony.

In the Vedas, many goddesses are described as playing a role in the process of creation and therefore have cosmogonic significance. There are a variety of myths in the Vedas that are explicitly cosmogonic or that contain cosmogonic elements, and the roles of individual female divinities and principles in the process of creation differ in the individual accounts. In this regard, it is helpful to distinguish between different phases in the unfolding of creation, and different types of creative principles. Regarding the first point, F. B. J. Kuiper has suggested that there are essentially two different stages in Vedic cosmogony: (1) the postulation of an undivided unity that represents the primordial state of the cosmos and in which there is no fixed or stable point of

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support, followed by (2) the differentiation of the originally undifferentiated primordial unity and the division of the worlds. 1 In the first stage, the cosmos exists in an un-manifest, subtle, potential state; it is only through some kind of transformative action that this primal unity is impelled into manifestation and differentiation (the second stage). The transition from the first to the second phase of creation requires some sort of catalyst capable of effecting a transformation. W. Norman Brown distinguishes between an animate, psychical, or willful being who is an active agent in creation, and an inanimate, material, insentient, non-psychical, and non-willful substance that can be identified as the object upon which the first being acts.² These two principles represent in philosophical terms an efficient and a material cause. It is often, although not always, through the agency of an active, willful being that the transformation from the first to the second stage occurs. In our analysis we will distinguish between stages and types of causal principles when referring to the role of female divinities in creation.

One must also be careful to distinguish between the cosmogonic roles of certain Vedic goddesses and their cosmological significance. Many passages ascribe to certain goddesses an active role in the process of creation; others assimilate goddesses to general structures inherent within the created universe either in conjunction with or apart from descriptions of cosmogonic events. With respect to both cosmogony and cosmology, some goddesses seem to be associated largely with materiality, the "stuff" of creation, whereas others are associated more with cosmic energy, the "life force" that generates the creative process and/or enlivens creation. The lines are often blurred, however, and many goddesses are affiliated with both. Such associations imbue these divinities with meaning beyond their individual identities and personalities.

It is also helpful in this regard to differentiate between these goddesses' concrete/personal identities and their abstract/impersonal significances. Just as there are different

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levels of the cosmogonic process and different kinds of principles of creation, so too there are distinct levels of manifestation of divinity. These can be chronological, conceptual, or both. Of the Vedic goddesses that we will examine, each has a personal identity, yet each also has or acquires an impersonal level of meaning that transcends the individuality of that particular goddess. In fact, although the various Vedic goddesses that we will discuss have distinct personalities and attributes, their individual identities are actually quite fluid. In the Samhitas, certain notable characteristics, both personal and impersonal, are consistently "cross-identified," that is, associated with more than one goddess. The tendency toward cross-identification is further accentuated in the Brahmanas and the Upanisads, where different goddesses who are depicted in the Samhitas as sharing traits and functions come to be explicitly equated with one another.

All of these tendencies—the association of goddesses with cosmogonic processes and cosmological structures, the attribution of abstract/impersonal levels of meaning to individual goddesses, and the cross-identification of traits and identities—represent seeds of the Great Goddess idea, seeds that will then sprout and develop in later scriptures. As we shall see, post-Vedic materials pick up and elaborate on these tendencies, and they become major ingredients in later formulations of the Goddess. Thus although there is no systematically articulated theology of a single Great Goddess in the Vedas, there are some important factors at work that influence the way in which the Great Goddess eventually comes

to be formulated. 3

In order to clarify the lines of continuity between the characteristics of various Vedic goddesses and those of *prakṛti* and *śakti* as these concepts are developed later in the tradition, we will explore in each layer of the Vedic texts some of the characteristics of six Vedic goddesses and goddess groups: the waters (*ap*), the goddess earth (Prthivi/Bhumi), Aditi, Viraj, Vac (and Sarasvati, with whom she is

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identified), and Saci/Indrani. By examining the Vedic texts layer by layer, one can trace the development of certain aspects of these goddesses' identities and traits. The deities that we will examine can be divided into two groups: those whose fundamental nature is primarily connected with materiality (*ap*, Prthivi, and Aditi), and those whose nature is more connected with the idea of a principle of energy (Viraj, Vac, and Saci/Indrani). We will begin our analysis of each group with the most abstract member, namely, the waters (*ap*) in the first group and Viraj in the second, and take each goddess or group of goddesses into account, exploring both the concrete, explicit nature of the deity according to the text, including all levels of expression of that deity, and the symbolic, implicit significance of each divinity. We do not wish to read anything "into" the text from outside it; our aim is rather to read "with" the text but also beyond it, attempting to interpret certain mythological constructs and suggest their possible significances in a larger context.

Samhitas

The Waters

In the Vedas, there appear to be two different levels of manifestation of the goddesses collectively referred to as the waters. On one level, the waters are concrete and are represented in personal terms as goddesses. At this level, they appear in three different forms: (1) atmospheric, where the waters are generally identified as celestial and are associated with natural phenomena like clouds and rain; (2) subterranean, flowing under the earth's surface; or (3) elemental, where the waters are concretely manifest, often as the water contained in rivers and streams or as the water employed by the Vedic priests in sacrifice. On another level, the waters are described as abstract and impersonal. They function at this level as the primordial,

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unmanifest foundation of physical creation. In this capacity, the waters serve as either the medium in which creation gestates or the subtle material matrix from which gross creation is derived. All of these categories represent different aspects or manifestations of the waters. The same naming term (*ap*) is generally used in all cases except for the most abstract level of demarcation, where the terms *ambhas*, *salila*, and *samudra* are sometimes used to denote the function of the primordial waters as the material matrix of creation. Only the term *ap* is feminine. *Ambhas* and *salila* are neuter nouns and *samudra* is masculine, suggesting that the waters thus described shed their specifically feminine identification.

As personal deities with qualities, the waters (*ap*) are depicted primarily as healing, purifying, life-giving, life-affirming, abundant, maternal goddesses, manifest as atmospheric, terrestrial, sacrificial, or in some other way tangibly liquid water. They are beneficent and are invoked often for aid, protection, strength, healing, or removal of impurity; 4 they are revered also as divine and immortal (*amṛta*).⁵ In Rg-Veda 1. 23. 18-19 the waters are described as the source of medicinal elixir:

I call the waters (*ap*), goddesses (*devi*), where our cows drink: may oblations be given to the streams. Elixir (*amṛta*) is in the waters: healing balms are in the waters; gods, be swift to praise (them).⁶

In Rg-Veda 10. 17. 10 they are invoked as mothers who are the source of purification:

May the waters (*ap*), mothers (*matr*), purify us; clarifiers of ghee, may they clean us with ghee, for the goddesses (*devi*) carry off all impurity: So I arise from them purified and bright.

Rg-Veda 10. 9. 1-6 also praises and invokes many of their auspicious qualities, such as their protective, nourishing, and

healing capacities:

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These waters, indeed, are refreshing: help us to look upon strength and great joy.

Like loving mothers (*matr*), give us here (a portion) of your most auspicious fluid. . . . Oh waters, you refresh and rejuvenate us.

May the waters, goddesses, be for our happiness and protection, and for drinking. May they pour forth happiness and welfare.

I beg the waters, sovereigns ruling over wealth and human beings, for healing balm (*bhesaja*).

Soma told me that within the waters are all healing balms and Agni, (who is) benevolent to all.

Other passages lauding the waters also praise their divine, maternal aspects. 7

The reference to Agni-in-the-waters in Rg-Veda 10. 9. 6 hints at the waters' motherly role. They are referred to as the mothers of Agni,⁸ who is frequently called the "Son of Waters, " or as mothers of Savitr,⁹ and they are described along with Aditi and the earth as the source of all the gods.¹⁰ Yet they are also assigned a more universal parental role as the "very motherly ones of all that stands and moves" or "mothers of the world" and sovereigns who have supreme control over human beings (above).¹¹ Besides their identity as goddesses or the maternal source of individual divinities, they are thus also lauded collectively as the mothers of all that exists.

The waters are also described in terms that hint at a more abstract level of functioning in cosmogony. The cosmogonic role of the waters has been noted by many scholars, including Kuiper, who associates the primeval waters with the first stage of Vedic cosmogony described above.¹² In many passages of the Samhitas, the waters assume the role of an undifferentiated, primordial matrix that serves as the support of and potential for material formation. This matrix is portrayed as womb-like, emphasizing the maternal,

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nurturing, motherly aspect of the waters, and usually represents the unmanifest, abstract, subtle stage of creation that is the potential state of the material, manifest cosmos. In this capacity, the waters also function as the material cause of creation.

The waters are the maternal medium in which either the gods or manifest creation itself is said to gestate until it is ready to be born. In Rg-Veda 10. 82. 5-6, for example, the waters are described as the primordial matrix receiving the embryo/germ (*garbha*) in which all the gods are gathered at the dawn of creation: ¹³

That which is beyond heaven, beyond this earth, beyond the gods and *asuras* what first embryo/germ, wherein all the gods beheld each other,¹⁴ did the waters (*ap*) hold?

The waters held that very first embryo/germ where all the gods came together, that one in which all worlds abide, placed on the navel of the Unborn.¹⁵

Here, the waters function as a kind of primordial womb in which the gods develop and from which they arise. This motif is also found in Rg-Veda 10. 121. 7-8, where the waters are the matrix that contains the universal *garbha*; they give birth to Agni, and simultaneously the one "life-breath" (*asu*) of the gods (probably the creator Prajapati) is produced:

Indeed, when the great waters (*ap*) came, bearing the universe as an embryo/germ, producing Agni, then arose the gods' one life breath . . . who with might surveyed the waters containing power (*daksa*) and producing sacrifice.

A similar role is described in Atharva-Veda 4. 2, a variant on Rg-Veda 10. 121:

The waters (*ap*), producing an offspring, set into motion in the beginning an embryo/germ (*garbha*).¹⁶

In these instances, the role of the waters is clearly feminine, for the waters act as the womb that bears creation in its potential form. The maternal nature of this role is underscored by the fact that in all these cases a feminine term (*ap*) is used to designate the waters.

In other passages, the role of the waters in the dawn of creation is somewhat different. In Rg-Veda 10. 129. 1-3, for example, the cosmic, primeval waters seem to act less as a womb and more as a kind of primal soup:

There was not nonexistence (*asat*) nor existence (*sat*) then: there was not air nor the heaven that is beyond. What did it cover up? where? In whose protection? Was water (*ambhas*) there, unfathomable, profound?

There was not death nor immortality then. There was not a beacon of night or day. That One, having no wind, breathed by its own power. Other than that, there was not anything beyond.

In the beginning, darkness was hidden by darkness. All this was water (*salila*), indistinguishable.

This hymn is extremely obscure, and it is difficult to understand clearly the relationships among the various elements in the text. Nevertheless, the waters are cited as existing before differentiated creation, when everything is water (10. 129. 3). At this time, there is only darkness hidden by darkness, indistinguishable (10. 129. 3); there is not yet even any distinction between *sat* and *asat* (10. 129. 1). The relation between the waters and "That One" (*tad ekam*) mentioned in verses two and three is an enigma. It may be that *tad ekam* emerges from the waters, but the connection is not clearly articulated. The waters are identified in this hymn as being present before the appearance of light and differentiated form but, although appearing to be some kind of primordial material principle, are not explicitly identified as the source itself of any further material creation. Whether or not the waters are manifest or unmanifest is also not articulated. The enigmatic nature of

the role of the waters reflects the enigmatic nature of the hymn, which presents the riddle of creation but does not attempt to solve it, preferring to pose questions without supplying answers.

Rg-Veda 10. 129 does not use the term *ap*, preferring the terms *ambhas* (10. 129. 1) and *salila* (10. 129. 3), both neuter nouns. Different terms used to designate the waters seem to indicate not different entities but rather different aspects of the same general principle. In Rg-Veda 7. 49. 1, for example, *ap*, *salila*, and *samudra* are different but related manifestations of the waters:

From the middle of the water (*salila*), the waters (*ap*), goddesses (*devi*), having the ocean as their chief (*samudrajyestha*), flow cleansing, restless.

Elsewhere, it is said that the streams and waters (*ap*) flow into the ocean (*samudra*). So, for example, in Rg-Veda 1. 32. 2, the waters released by Indra in his battle with Vrtra are described as coming quickly down to the ocean.

In Rg-Veda 10. 129, then, the use of neuter terms seems to indicate that in this context the waters are conceived of not as feminine entities but as principles devoid of gender. The use of gender-neutral terminology frustrates attempts toward personification and thus would make sense in this most abstract of hymns that emphasizes the enigmatic, inscrutable, abstruse nature of creation. Here, as in the cosmogonic hymns mentioned above, the waters are described as a kind of primordial matrix present at the undifferentiated phase of creation.

Although in Rg-Veda 10. 129 the precise position of the waters in the unfolding of the cosmogonic drama is unclear, in Rg-Veda 10. 190 they seem to appear at the crucial transitional phase between the primordial stage of creation and the emergence of differentiated forms:

Order (*ṛta*) and truth (*satya*) were born from inflamed heat (*tapas*).

From that arose night; from that (arose) the foaming ocean (*samudra*).

From that foaming ocean was born the year, arranger of days and nights, Lord over all that blinks.

Dhatr [the creator/ordainer] arranged in succession the sun and moon, heaven and earth, the midregions and light.

In this hymn, heat (*tapas*) is said to generate order (*rta*) and truth (*satya*), both of which are abstract principles, and night (*ratri*). This represents Kuiper's first phase the undifferentiated, primordial state of creation. Following this, heat then generates the cosmic waters in the form of an ocean (*samudra*). From these waters is born the year, which then arranges time into days and nights and becomes the ruler over "all that blinks, " that is, all living creatures. This leads to the creation of the sun, moon, heaven, earth, midregions, and light by Dhatr, the creator or ordainer. The first element of differentiated creation, time, is produced directly from the waters, followed by the proper arrangement of the cosmos effected by Dhatr, who is the efficient cause of the manifest, ordered universe.

A similar position at the dawn of differentiated creation is attributed to the waters in the Taittiriya Samhita, where the waters act as a kind of primal matter. They are transformed into earth through the mediation of fire:

In the beginning, this was the waters (*ap*), water (*salila*); He, Prajapati, becoming wind, hovered (*√li*) on a lotus leaf. He found no support. He saw that nest (*kulaya*) of the waters (*ap*); he piled fire (*agni*) on it; that became this (*iyam*, namely, the earth). Then indeed he stood firm. 17

The primordial state of the undifferentiated cosmos is represented as formless water, which is the material matrix present at the dawn of creation, the unmanifest potential of the cosmos that must be disturbed in some way in order for

differentiated creation to come about. When the waters are transformed, they become the earth. This theme is echoed in Taittiriya Samhita 7. 1. 5. 1:

In the beginning, this was the waters (*ap*), water (*salila*). Prajapati, becoming wind, moved in it. He saw her; becoming a boar, he seized her. Becoming Visvakarman, he rubbed (*vi mrj*) her. She extended (*prath*); she became the earth (*prthivi*); hence the earthness of earth. Prajapati made effort in her. He created the gods, Vasus, Rudras, and Adityas.

In this version, the waters are identified again not only as a kind of primal matter, but also as the source of the manifest earth from which Prajapati then furthers his creation. The waters are the original, primordial "stuff" from which other "stuff" is created. The waters are also affirmed as the basis of the manifest world in Taittiriya Samhita 2. 1. 5. 4:

The plants (*osadhi*) are the waters (*ap*), man is what is not; the waters indeed give him existence (*sat*) from nonexistence (*asat*); therefore they say, both he who knows thus and he who does not, the waters, indeed, give existence from nonexistence.

As cosmogonic principles or as personal deities the waters are also attributed special powers, especially healing and procreative powers, and are invoked for strength. 18 In Rg-Veda 10. 121 (above), the waters are said to contain *daksa*, meaning "energy, " "strength, " or "power, " which is also personified and associated with the goddess Aditi. Even Agni is said to have absorbed his powers (*svadha*) from the waters when he dwelt in their lap.¹⁹ Although one cannot draw any definite conclusions about the nature of the capabilities attributed to the waters in the Samhitas, it is important to note that the waters are conceived to be imbued with some sort of inherent abilities or powers that are mentioned in passing but not developed.

In the Samhitas, the goddess earth, Prthivi or Bhumi, is less abstract than the waters. There appear to be three different aspects of Prthivi's nature in the Samhitas: (1) the physical earth that sustains living creatures and upon which we live; (2) the universal mother of physical creation; and (3) manifest matter itself that is formed in the cosmogonic process and, like the waters, is part of the narrative of creation. This last aspect is elaborated only in the Yajur-Veda Samhita and thus appears to have been developed later than the other two.

Prthivi is addressed as "mother" (*matr*) in several hymns, 20 and her maternal nature appears to be her dominant quality. As a motherly figure, she is depicted primarily in the first two roles mentioned above, that is, as the abundant, life-supporting physical earth that is the mother of living creatures and as the maternal source of the manifest world. Although such depictions are found in the Rg-Veda, one of the most elaborate expressions of these aspects of Prthivi appears in Atharva-Veda 12. 1:

May Prthivi, who bears plants (*osadhi*)²¹ having varied powers, spread forth and accommodate us . . . may this earth on which what breathes and moves is active assign us precedence in drinking. There are four regions of this earth, on which food and men have sprung up and which bears abundantly breathing and moving (creatures); may this earth bestow on us cattle, indeed, inexhaustibleness. . . . May she [earth] yield precious nectar; may she sprinkle us with vital power (*varcas*). . . . May this earth having many streams yield milk for us . . . may this earth, a mother to me her son, pour forth milk for us. . . . Let us always move along on the firm earth, Prthivi, all-producing mother of plants, sustained by order (*dharma*), all-gracious.²²

As the physical earth, Prthivi is a bountiful goddess described as the source of plants and herbs and is called the

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all-producer (*visvamsu*).²³ She is invoked to pour out nectar and milk to feed her children and is said to have golden breasts.²⁴ As a giver of life, Prthivi also appears to be elevated to a more abstract level of conception where her maternal nature is emphasized in a general sense. She is perceived to be the universal mother and sovereign of manifest creation described as conceiving the germ of all things that exist and bearing all things in her womb,²⁵ and she reigns as the mistress of whatever is and whatever is to be.²⁶ In this capacity, she shares certain qualities with the waters, but Prthivi is never described as subtle or unmanifest.

In addition to her aspect as the physical earth, Prthivi is also portrayed as the universal mother coupled with the universal father Dyaus, the male deity of the heavens. This portrayal of earth is particularly prevalent in the Rg-Veda. Together, Prthivi and Dyaus are invoked as the parents of the world and of the gods.²⁷ Prthivi is described as supporting the moving world that dwells upon her and, along with Dyaus, is praised as all-sustaining:

May that blessed, very victorious pair that supports (us), Dyaus-Prthivi, protect us from terrible danger.²⁸

The coupling of Prthivi and Dyaus is one of the earliest expressions in Vedic literature of consort pairing, which, as we will see, pertains also to other goddesses in the Samhitas and becomes even more prevalent in the Brahmanas. Prthivi and Dyaus supply the prototype for the universal male/ female parental pair.

Prthivi's place in cosmogony is articulated especially in the Yajur-Veda Samhitas, where Prthivi's relationship to the cosmogonic waters becomes particularly important and she is sometimes described as lifted out of the primordial waters or derived from water. In some Yajur-Veda narratives, for example, the waters are said to cover the earth in the beginning of creation; a boar dives down and brings up the earth, which then floats on the surface of

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the waters. ²⁹ Taittiriya Samhita 7. 1. 5. 1 cited above describes the earth as actually created from the waters, and Atharva-Veda 12. 1. 8 states that Prthivi was water (*salila*) in the beginning of creation. Thus it appears that the waters may be said to represent the most abstract level of materiality, and earth the next stage of formation. The waters are the fundamental material cause of the cosmos, often described as being manipulated by a creator figure who acts as the

efficient cause of creation, and the earth is what is first formed.

Like the waters, Prthivi is also thought to have special powers, especially procreative powers. She is described as having great inherent might (*mahi svatavas*)³⁰ and as having forces (*urj*) that flow forth from her body.³¹ As is also the case with the waters, this particular aspect of Prthivi is mentioned in passing but not further developed.

Aditi

Literally, *aditi* is an adjective meaning "unbounded. " As a goddess in the Vedas, Aditi seems to have many different aspects, but she is depicted primarily in three ways: (1) as a mother figure; (2) as similar or equivalent to the earth; and (3) as a universal, abstract goddess, representing physical creation itself or aspects of physical creation.

Above all, Aditi is the mother of the seven Adityas. The story of her children's birth is recounted in Rg-Veda 10. 72, where Aditi is said to have given birth to eight sons. She threw away the eighth, Martanda, but later brought him again to life. As a mother, Aditi is also depicted in more nearly universal terms, and in her great nurturing capacity is often identified as a cow.³² She is called "our birthplace, " the great mother, or the mother of kings.³³ She shares her maternal nature with the waters and the earth, and in Rg-Veda 10. 63. 2, all three (Aditi, the waters, and the earth) are said to give birth to the gods:

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Indeed, all your names, oh gods, are to be honored, praised, and worshiped; (you) that are born here of Aditi, the waters (*ap*), and earth (*prthivi*), hear my call.

This verse suggests that Aditi, the waters, and earth may on some level be different aspects of one another, for they are homologized by being cited collectively as mother of the gods. In this vein, Aditi is at times equated with the earth ³⁴ and is often presented in terms that are reminiscent of descriptions of Prthivi. She is described, for example, as having unrivaled bounteousness³⁵ and as being extended or broad (*uruvi*).³⁶

On an abstract level, Aditi seems to be represented in ways that suggest she is more than an individual goddess. On this level, she is equated with aspects of the cosmos:

Aditi is the heaven, Aditi is the middle region (*antariksa*), Aditi is the mother, she is the father, she is the son; all the gods are Aditi, and the five clans; Aditi is what has been born (*jata*) and what will be born (*janitva*).³⁷

In Atharva-Veda 7. 6. 4, she is described as the great mother in whose lap lies the atmosphere. Similarly, in Vajasaneyi Samhita 9. 5, she is represented as the support of the cosmos:

In conception of strength³⁸ we call with speech the great mother, Aditi, on whom this whole world has settled.

In such passages, Aditi is imbued with a cosmic significance, suggesting that she is identified with the unbounded physical realm. This aspect of her nature is noted by F. Max Müller, who characterizes Aditi in her cosmic role as "the Beyond, the unbounded realm beyond earth, sky, and heaven. "³⁹ He describes Aditi as

the visible Infinite, visible, as it were, to the naked eye, the endless expanse beyond the earth, beyond the

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clouds, beyond the sky. That was called A-diti, the unbound, the un-bounded . . . and meant therefore originally what is free from bonds of any kind, whether of space or time, free from physical weakness, free from moral guilt. ⁴⁰

Although Müller's assessment of Aditi's significance may stretch the limits of the textual evidence somewhat, she certainly has some kind of abstract, universal significance associated with physical creation even though her precise nature is not clearly articulated.

In Rg-Veda 10. 72, Aditi also appears to be associated with *daksa*, which the waters are said to contain in Rg-Veda 10. 121. 8, but here *daksa* is personified. In Rg-Veda 10. 72. 4, Aditi is said to give birth to Daksa, who in turn is said to produce her in an act of mutual procreation. Daksa in this case is probably a proper name referring to an individual deity, but as noted above the term itself can mean "energy, "strength, " or "power. "

Viraj

Viraj is an enigmatic character whose personal identity in the Samhitas is less fully elaborated than that of the other deities that concern our investigation. She is mentioned only three times in the Rg-Veda, and in one of these instances seems to be a Vedic meter rather than a deity.⁴¹ In Rg-Veda 9. 96. 18, Soma is compared to Viraj and is described as being "like Viraj, resplendent as a singer, " but nothing further is specified.

In Rg-Veda 10. 90, the Purusa-Sukta, Viraj is attributed cosmogonic qualities. This hymn describes the sacrifice of the cosmic being, the thousand-headed Purusa, who is the source of all creation; different parts of his body engender the different parts of the cosmos. In this verse, Purusa and Viraj are said to produce each other, for "from him Viraj was born; again from Viraj Purusa (was born). "⁴² Nothing else is said

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about the particular qualities of Viraj, and it is not clear from this passage that she is even identified here as female.

In the Atharva-Veda, on the other hand, Viraj in her cosmological aspect is usually described as female, although she also appears to be identified as a male being or as a hermaphrodite on some occasions. ⁴³ Even in Atharva-Veda 8. 9. 7, where Viraj is called the father of devotion, the verses that follow attribute to her a female gender. It is in this Samhita that her creative and cosmological significance comes to the fore.

The cosmogonic role of Viraj is described in Atharva-Veda 8. 10, where Viraj is described as a divine, cosmic force that enters and enlivens all creation:⁴⁴

Viraj truly was here in the beginning. All were afraid of her (when she was) born, (thinking), "She alone will become this. " She rose; she entered the householder's fire (*garhapatya*). . . . She rose; she entered the fire of offering (*ahavaniya*). . . . She rose; she entered the southern fire (*daksina*). . . . She rose; she entered the assembly (*sabha*). . . . She rose; she entered the meeting (*samiti*). . . . She rose; she entered consultation (*mantrana*). . . . She rose; she stood striding out fourfold in the middle region. The gods and men said of her, "She alone knows this. Let us invoke her that we both may live. "⁴⁵

Further on in the hymn, she is said to rise and come to the trees, the fathers (pitr), the gods, and men, by each of whom she is killed; yet she always regenerates, suggesting that she has some kind of immortal character. When Viraj again rises and approaches various groups of beings—the asuras and gods, fathers, men, seven *rsis*, *apsarases* and *gandharvas*, other people, and serpents—they each milk from her some substance upon which they depend. In this context, Viraj is connected to notions that we will pursue in later Brahmanical literature, for in Atharva-Veda 8. 10. 22, Viraj is explicitly identified with the *maya* of the asuras:

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She rose; she came to the *asuras*. The *asuras* called to her, "Oh Maya, come here. " Virocana Prahradi was her calf; an iron vessel (was) the (milking) vessel. Dvimurdha Artvya milked her; he milked that very Maya. The *asuras* subsist on that Maya.

The uses and connotations of the term *maya* in the Vedic literature are quite complex and will be taken up in the next chapter. Suffice it to say for the moment that the term is used in this passage to denote that upon which the *asuras* depend for their existence. ⁴⁶ For our purposes, what is most important is that a female divinity (for in this hymn Viraj is clearly female) is described in terms that suggest she is a universal creative power that is explicitly identified with the *maya* of the *asuras*. As we shall see, the connection of a principle of energy described as feminine with the term *maya* is of particular significance in our investigation.

The opening of the first verse of Atharva-Veda 8. 10 ("Viraj truly was here in the beginning") suggests that Viraj may also be thought of as a kind of foundational material principle.⁴⁷ She is invoked as strength, yet she also has a nourishing aspect and is likened to a cow.⁴⁸ Elsewhere, Viraj is identified with speech, earth, and the midregions, suggesting a general association between Viraj and material creation, but in this passage Viraj is also identified with Prajapati and Mrtyu, death, and is ascribed male gender.⁴⁹ Generally, the explicitly material aspect of Viraj is not as well developed in the Samhitas as are the universal energizing capabilities that dominate her character.

As a cosmic energizing principle, Viraj is also described as breathless but moving by the breath of breathing that is, living creatures. It is by her control that the *yaksas*, a class of supernatural beings, move, and she is described as touching (*mrs*) all existence.⁵⁰ Containing great power, she enters all creation:

She is this very one that first shone forth; entered into these others, she goes about. Great powers are within

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her. The woman, the first-bearing mother, has approached. ⁵¹

Vac (And Sarasvati)

Throughout the Samhitas, Vac, "speech, " is portrayed on two levels: (1) as manifest in the faculty of speech, expressed in human language, and (2) as a goddess ascribed certain universal creative powers.⁵²

Vac's manifestation in earthly speech is particularly lauded in Rg-Veda 10. 71. In this hymn, Vac's first utterances are said to be sent forth when names are given to objects.⁵³ Men following the "trace of Vac" discover that she has entered into those who are able to best apprehend her, the seers (*rsis*), who then send her forth in their own speech:

With sacrifice they followed the track of Vac; they found her entered into the *rsis*. Bringing her near, they distributed her in many places. Seven singers chant (her) together.

Many a one, seeing, has not seen Vac; many a one, hearing, does not hear her. But to many another she has revealed herself, like a longing, well-dressed wife to her husband.⁵⁴

Rg-Veda 8. 89. 11 asserts that the gods generated Vac and now animals of every type speak her, suggesting that she is manifest in all earthly vocal utterances. Rg-Veda 1. 164. 45 indicates that this earthly dimension is only one quarter of the totality of Vac, whose other three quarters are concealed and do not come forth. What humans speak constitutes only the fourth dimension:

Vac is measured out in four parts. Those Brahmins with insight know these (parts). Three parts, which are hidden, mortals do not activate, (but) they speak the fourth part.⁵⁵

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Atharva-Veda 9. 10. 13 echoes a similar sentiment, describing Vac as abiding in the highest heaven. Thus Vac has a divine, transcendent aspect as well as an earthly dimension.

In Rg-Veda 10. 125, Vac describes herself as powerful and all-pervasive:

I am queen, gatherer of riches, knowing, the first among those worthy of being honored. I am she, having many stations (and) much-bestowing, whom the gods have distributed in many places.

Through me, he who discerns, who breathes, who indeed hears what is said, eats his food. Though ignorant (of this), they dwell in me. Hear that you are heard! What I tell you is to be believed.

I, myself, say this welcome news to gods and men. He whom I love, I make him powerful, (I make) him a Brahmin, (I make) him a seer (*rsi*), (I make) him wise. . . . I have entered into heaven and earth. I bring forth the father at the summit of this (creation). My *yoni* (womb/ origin/abode) is within the waters (*ap*), in the ocean

(*samudra*). Thence I extend over all worlds, and I touch heaven with my uppermost part.

I also blow forth like the wind, reaching all the worlds. Beyond heaven, beyond the earth, so great have I become through my grandeur. 56

This hymn indicates that Vac is immanent in creation ("distributed in many places" and "entered into heaven and earth") but also transcendent ("beyond heaven, beyond the earth"). She is that which sustains and enlivens all of creation, a principle of life-energy that pervades the universe. In verse seven, Vac is associated with the (primordial) waters, from which she stretches forth extending throughout the worlds, and in which is located her *yonī*. The term *yonī* can mean "place of rest" or "seat, " which would signify that Vac's abode resides in the waters. Or, the term can mean "origin" or "place of birth, " indicating that Vac may be born in the waters. Finally,

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and perhaps most significantly, the term can mean "womb, uterus" or "vagina. " If this is in fact what is meant by the term in this context, then the waters are the womb or generative organ of Vac. Such a description of the relationship between the waters and the goddess would emphasize the above-described role of the waters as cosmic womb and thus would be in keeping with descriptions of the cosmogonic role of the waters narrated elsewhere in the Rg-Veda. It would also indicate that the waters are an aspect of Vac.

Vac's role in creation and her relationship with the cosmic waters are described somewhat differently in Rg-Veda 1. 164. 41-42, which portrays Vac as a buffalo-cow (*gaūrī*) who lows, forming the waters (*salila*) and bringing creation into existence:

The buffalo-cow [Vac] lowed; she fashioned the floods (*salila*), having become one-footed, two-footed, four-footed, eight-footed, nine-footed, she who in the highest heaven has a thousand syllables.

From her flow forth the (heavenly) oceans (*samudra*), on account of which the four directions exist, and from her flows the *aksara* (imperishable/syllable), on which the entire universe exists. 57

In this hymn, Vac is the source of the primordial waters that form the subtle material matrix of creation. They flow forth in differentiated streams as her utterances, and manifest creation is formed from this speech-water. The physical cosmos is born through Vac's creative powers, which give rise to the primal floods. Here, as in Rg-Veda 10. 125, Vac is connected to the primordial waters.

The association between Vac and water is in fact important. Vac is equated with the river goddess Sarasvati in the Yajur-Veda and in later texts.⁵⁸ As a hypostatized river, Sarasvati is an aspect of the goddess-waters (*ap*) and shares some of their characteristics. She is associated with wealth, power, and medicine, as are the waters;⁵⁹ like them also, she

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is said to abound in milk and is depicted as a maternal figure who nourishes her progeny. ⁶⁰ She is described as the divine one in which all living beings are situated⁶¹ and in Atharva-Veda 7. 10 is asked to nurse her children:

Your breast, which is ever-flowing, delightful, favorable, well-invoked, granting good gifts, by which you nourish all precious things, Sarasvati, make it be received.

Sarasvati is also conceived as penetrating and filling the realms of the earth and the firmament, and she is said to have sprung from three sources.⁶² She is called the best of rivers (*naditama*) and is depicted as extremely potent, surpassing all other waters in strength.⁶³

Like the other goddesses that we have examined thus far, Sarasvati also has more than one aspect in the Samhitas. Besides being a river goddess, she is also connected with Vedic sacrifice. Sarasvati is often invoked and called to the sacrifice along with her two partners, Ila and Bharati (or Mahi), and it is said that the pious worship Sarasvati during sacrifice.⁶⁴ She is also said to govern all thought and is invoked for inspiration.⁶⁵ The identification of Sarasvati with Vac is a highly complex problem, and the mechanisms of this equation are beyond the scope of this investigation.⁶⁶ It

should be noted, however, that the descriptions of Vac link her generally with the waters, which share with her a cosmogonic and cosmological role, and in later texts with Sarasvati, who is a manifestation of these waters. The connection between Vac and the maternal waters is more developed in the Brahmanas, where the two appear to be different aspects of the same principle.

Vac apparently also has a more nourishing, maternal dimension, and, like other goddesses we have examined, she is likened to a cow and is described as yielding food.⁶⁷ However, it is her all-pervading, enlivening powers rather than her maternal qualities that dominate Vac's character.

Saci/Indrani

The term *sad* is used in the Vedas primarily in two ways: (1) as a general term for the strength of the gods; and (2) as a proper name for the wife of Indra, also called Indrani.

As a general term denoting strength or the divine powers of the gods, *saci* is used several times in the Rg-Veda Samhita and is associated especially with Indra. The term *sacivat*, "possessed of might," is used to describe Indra and is applied to other deities on only two occasions; similarly, the epithet *sacipati*, "lord of might," which is used to describe Indra, is ascribed to other divinities only once, when it is applied to the Asvins (Rg-Veda 7. 67. 5).⁶⁸ The term is often used in the instrumental plural to denote the agency by means of which the gods execute their actions.⁶⁹

The term *saci* in the Rg-Veda Samhita, as in later literature, is also another name for Indra's wife, Indrani.⁷⁰ As his consort, Saci is Indra's strength personified. S. K. Das argues that the terms *sakti* and *sad* originally denoted the nature functions of divinities and sees in the hypostatized Saci a development whereby the power of a divinity, his *sakti* or *saci*, is conceived of in feminine terms and then deified. In this regard, Das distinguishes between *sakti/saci* and a similar group of goddesses called Gnas, "women," who are the divine consorts of the gods.

In the Vedic stage Gna certainly implies in the collective sense a 'group of Divine Females' who produce or promote fertility and wealth. Thus whereas the Rgvedic Sacis represent 'Divine Powers' as the deified nature functions of male gods, forming an essential element in the constitution of the latter's personalities, the Gnas are distinctly separate principles of 'female energy' acting in association with their 'male counterparts'.⁷¹

Unlike the Gnas, who are personified as distinct female divinities, Saci/Indrani appears to be portrayed as the energy that is an inherent aspect of her male counterpart and is identified as female. As we shall see, in later literature this image of a god possessed of a divine, female power will become a central theme in accounts of cosmogony and contributes to the way in which the Great Goddess is constructed. We do not find in Saci the same explicit cosmogonic or cosmological implications that we have seen in Vac and Viraj; nevertheless, by embodying the nature of divine energy presented in the Rg-Veda as the feminine aspect of a male deity, Saci represents an important piece of the puzzle.

In the Vedic Samhitas, we can discern two important tendencies regarding the nature of female divinities. First, several different goddesses are associated in some way and on some level with materiality and/or a principle of energy. These goddesses are sometimes represented in concrete terms and associated with visible, manifest aspects of the cosmos, but they are also conceived in abstract terms and associated with nonvisible, non-manifest principles of creation. Both levels of description are present in the Samhitas. Second, although these goddesses are discrete divinities, they share certain traits and characteristics, and similar terms may be used to describe different goddesses. Thus there is a certain amount of cross-attribution of traits and even identity (as in the case of Aditi-Prthivi, Sarasvati-Vac). Furthermore, goddesses who are associated with materiality may also be attributed powers, and vice-versa; the principles of materiality and energy are not distinctly separate from one another. Thus goddesses associated with matter are not portrayed as entirely passive, and those connected to the principle of energy are associated also with materiality.

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The depiction in the Samhitas of the different goddesses that we have examined thus far leads us to conclude that the association of materiality and energy with female divinity seems to be part of the Vedic tradition from the very beginning of its existence. We have also seen that although many of the characteristics of these goddesses are shared, each goddess is portrayed as a discrete, individual deity. In the Brahmanas, two further developments occur: (1) the tendency for different discrete goddesses to shed their individual uniqueness and to be identified with one another in some way is increasingly prominent; and (2) through this process of cross-identification, a more general notion of female divinity that is rather fluid in character begins to become increasingly dominant. Individual goddesses become less distinct and are associated more generally with one another and with cosmogonic and cosmological structures. Thus the personal level of identity of these divinities tends to take a back seat, while their abstract identities and functions become increasingly important.

The Waters

Descriptions of the waters as the matrix of creation are found scattered throughout the Brahmanas even outside of any cosmogonic context. The waters (*ap*) are described as the great ocean present at the beginning,⁷³ the foundation (*pratistha*) of the universe,⁷⁴ and the first-made of the universe.⁷⁵ They are said to have produced everything that exists.⁷⁶ The notion that the waters are present at the beginning of the cosmogonic process and are in some way foundational seems to be well accepted in these texts, and they are even described generally as pervading (\sqrt{ap}) all of creation.⁷⁷ The waters are also identified with the gods and are called the abode of all the gods.⁷⁸

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The role of the waters in creation is described in different cosmogonic accounts in the Brahmanas, especially in the Satapatha Brahmana. As in the Samhitas, the waters are described both as a kind of cosmic womb and as the material foundation from which the differentiated cosmos is derived. Yet they are also described collectively as the willing agent of creation, the efficient cause that impels the cosmos into manifestation. In all cases, their appearance marks the beginning of the transition from the primary stage of creation to the unfolding of the second phase.

The waters retain their identity as the primordial womb that receives the primeval egg (*anda*) in Satapatha Brahmana 6. 1. 9-10. In this account of creation, the non-existent (which is also identified as the *rsis* or as Indra) gives rise to seven persons, which combine to form one person, Prajapati the creator. Prajapati then fashions the waters (*ap*) out of Vac, who is identified with the world (*loka*). The waters pervade and cover everything. Prajapati then enters the waters along with the triple Veda, giving rise to an egg:

He [Prajapati] produced the waters out of Vac alone, (who is) the world. That very Vac was his; she was sent forth. She pervaded all this; and because she pervaded (\sqrt{ap}) whatever (existed), therefore she (is called) water (*ap*). Because she covered (\sqrt{var}), therefore (she is called) water (*var*).

He desired, "May I be reproduced from these waters. "

He entered the waters with that triple knowledge. Thence an egg arose. He touched it. He said, "May it be! May it be! May it be still more!" From it *brahman*, the triple knowledge, was first produced.

As in Rg-Veda 10. 82. 5-6 and Rg-Veda 10. 121. 7, the waters here function as a universal matrix of gestation. Vac is described as the source of the waters, echoing the pattern found in Rg-Veda 1. 164. 41-42. ⁷⁹ We will discuss the relationship between Vac and the waters in greater detail below.

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The role of the waters as the material basis of the manifest world is more prominent in Satapatha Brahmana 6. 1. 3. Here, the primordial waters flow forth from Prajapati's body when he practices *tapas*:

In the beginning, indeed, Prajapati, one alone, was here. He desired, "May I exist! May I be reproduced!" He exerted himself; he practiced austerity (*tapas*). From him, exhausted and heated, the waters were produced; from that heated person, the waters are born.

The term *tapas*, from the verbal root *tap*, means both "heat" and "ascetic austerity," for ascetic practices are said to heat up the body. In this passage, the waters are produced from Prajapati's heated (*tap*) body; the waters are then heated to produce foam, which is then heated to produce clay, which gives rise to sand, from which is produced the pebble, and so forth. The waters that emerge from the heated body of Prajapati are, then, the immediate source of differentiated material forms.

In other accounts, the waters are collectively the personal creative principle that toils to produce creation, as well as the womb in which the incipient cosmos gestates in the form of an egg. For example, in Satapatha Brahmana 11. 1. 6. 1, the waters are described in the same manner as is Prajapati in 6. 1. 3:

In the beginning, indeed, this was water (*ap*), only water (*salila*). They [the waters] desired, "How, now, might we reproduce?" They exerted themselves; they practiced austerity (*tapas*). When they were practicing austerity, a golden egg was produced.

From the golden egg is born Prajapati, the creator and fashioner of the world. In another account, the waters practice *tapas* and conceive, later giving birth to the sun. 80 In these cosmogonic variants, the role of the waters in the birth of the cosmos is conflated with that of the personal

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agent of creation, who is usually identified in the Brahmanas as Prajapati.

The feminine identity of the waters is preserved throughout these texts. The waters are described as female (*vrsa*), 81 equated with the wives of the gods, 82 likened to an *apsaras*, 83 and are even represented in one passage as having their period favorable for conception. 84

Earth/Aditi/Viraj

In the Brahmanas, as in the Samhitas, the earth is less abstract than the waters but is similarly represented as a manifestation of the material matrix of creation. Earth is described in Satapatha Brahmana 6. 1. 1. 12ff. as being formed by Prajapati when he compresses the shell of the primordial egg and throws it into the waters:

He desired, "May I produce this [the earth] from these waters!" Pressing it together, he cast it into the waters. The juice that flowed from it directed outwards became a tortoise; then what was sprinkled upwards (became) that which is produced above the waters. This all dissolved in the waters. This appeared as one form only, as water only.

He desired, "May it be greater! May it reproduce!" He practiced austerity. Exhausted, having practiced austerity, he emitted foam. He knew that, "indeed, this form is different; it is becoming more. I must exert myself." Exhausted, having performed austerity, he produced clay, mud, salty soil, and sand, gravel, rock, ore, gold, plants and trees. Thus he covered the earth.

This was produced. . . . He said, "This, indeed, has become (*bhu*) a foundation." Thus, it became the earth (*bhumi*). He spread it out (*prath*), and it became the earth (*prthivi*).

This phase of creation represents a further stage of development following that described in Satapatha Brahmana

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6. 1. 1. 9-10 cited above. Elsewhere, the earth is also said to lie spread out on the waters, 85 or Prajapati is described as the begetter of both of them. 86 Earth is no longer coupled with Dyaus but rather with Prajapati, who is described as her mate. 87 There is no apparent evidence that the earth in this sense represents anything other than the physical, manifest

earth.

The earth is also called a cow and a female buffalo (*mahisi*) and is identified with Vac.⁸⁸ She retains her female identity and her place in cosmogony but loses many of the distinctive features that characterize her in the Samhitas. In the Brahmanas, the earth is consistently identified with Aditi,⁸⁹ and the two are almost completely conflated. However, Aditi also retains her larger identity as the generally manifest cosmos and is referred to as "all this, whatever this universe is."⁹⁰ Aditi, too, is identified with Vac.⁹¹

Whereas the waters represent the unmanifest complex from which creation emerges in the beginning of time, the goddess earth/Aditi represents the physically present universe that living creatures inhabit and in which they function. Viraj seems to be a specific aspect of this creation, namely, food (*anna*), with which Viraj is consistently identified.⁹² As food, Viraj promotes life on the level of manifest creation but does not appear to retain any explicit cosmological significance.

Vac/Sarasvati

In the Brahmanas Sarasvati is homologized with Vac so that the two become completely identified with one another,⁹³ and Vac is frequently called Sarasvati-Vac. She is consistently mentioned in connection with cosmogony, where she plays the role of the catalyst that in some way activates the unfolding of the cosmos. In this context, Vac is often associated with Prajapati, the creator, either as his mate or as the instrument with which he creates. As noted

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above, she is also associated with the waters and with the goddess earth/Aditi. In fact, the waters, the earth/Aditi, and Vac all seem to represent different aspects of the same general creative principle.

In several of the accounts of creation that are found in the Brahmanas, Prajapati is portrayed as the personal creator figure who orchestrates the manifestation of the physical universe. In this capacity, he is often aided by Vac, whom he manipulates in some way or with whom he unites to set in motion the mechanisms of cosmogony. On this level, speech is not necessarily identified as the goddess Vac but may also refer to the faculty of speech, which is a manifestation of the goddess herself. For example, we have seen in Satapatha Brahmana 11. 1. 6. 1 that the waters perform *tapas*, leading to the creation of a golden egg. Prajapati is born from the golden egg; he speaks the words, "*bhuh*, *bhuvah*, *svah*," and thus the three worlds (earth, midregions, and sky) are born:

After a year, he wished to speak. He said, "*bhuh*;" this became the earth. He said, "*bhuvah*;" this became the midregions. He said, "*svah*;" this became the sky. ⁹⁴

In Pañcavimsa a Brahmana 20. 14. 2-5 cited below, Prajapati creates the three worlds with the three sounds "*a*" (earth), "*ka*" (midregions), "*ho*" (heaven).⁹⁵ Elsewhere, Prajapati is said to unite sexually with Vac in his creative effort. In Satapatha Brahmana 6. 1. 2. 6ff., for example, it is stated that on four occasions Prajapati copulates with speech (*vac*) mentally or, literally, with his mind (*manasa*). Each time, Prajapati becomes "filled with drops," which he emits (√*srj*), creating the Vasus, Rudras, Adityas, and all-gods, respectively.

The mental union between Prajapati and Vac described above hints at another pattern that we find throughout the Brahmanas: as the faculty of speech, Vac is often associated not only with Prajapati but also with his mind (*manas*) or the faculty of mind in general.⁹⁶ Speech and mind are said to rest on one another.⁹⁷ Mind is male, speech is

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female, and they are described as a couple; ⁹⁸ together, mind and speech are said to convey the sacrifice to the gods.⁹⁹ Mind is often considered to be more subtle and more fundamental than speech, which simply gives expression to the mind's contents. It is stated, for example, that mind supports speech, going before it and preparing it, and of the two, mind is better because speech only imitates mind.¹⁰⁰

Mind and speech are also paired in cosmogonic contexts, and mind is said to preexist speech and to be its source. In Satapatha Brahmana 10. 5. 3. 1-4, for example, mind, which is declared to be neither existent (*sat*) nor nonexistent

(*asat*), is present at the beginning of the universe and sends forth speech. In Pañcavimsa Brahmana 7. 6. 1-3, Prajapati wishes to reproduce, so he meditates, and the contents of his mind become the *brhat*, a kind of *saman* or Vedic chant. He sends forth the *brhat* through speech, which becomes the *rathantara* (another kind of *saman*):

Prajapati desired, "May I be many, may I be reproduced. " He meditated silently in his mind; what was in his mind, that became the *brhat* (*saman*). He thought, "This my embryo/germ (*garbha*) is hidden; I will bring it forth through speech (*vac*)". He released speech. This speech became the *rathantara*.

In the Pañcavimsa Brahmana, as well as in other Brahmanas, the *rathantara* is often equated with both the earth and Vac, who are also assimilated to one another.¹⁰¹ As the *rathantara*, Vac is usually coupled with the *brhat*, which is equated with mind or its contents, as in the Pañcavimsa Brahmana passage above. It is through the interaction of mind and speech, *brhat* and *rathantara*, that creation comes about. At times, mind and speech are also associated with breath (*prana*), or speech is coupled with breath. In Aitareya Brahmana 2. 27, for example, speech is invoked together with breath, and in Satapatha Brahmana 7. 5. 1. 7

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and 10. 1. 1. 9, breath (*prana*) is said to be the male mate of speech (*vac*), thus taking the place of both Prajapati and mind.¹⁰²

In the Brahmanas, the coupling of speech with Prajapati or mind participates in a larger series of correspondences in which speech and mind are correlated with the different orders of reality established in the Brahmanas and Upanisads: the natural order (*adhibhuta*), divine order (*adhidaiva*), human order (*adhyatma*), and sacrificial order (*adhiyajña*).¹⁰³ In the natural order, speech is said to correspond to this world or earth, and mind to "yonder" world or heaven.¹⁰⁴ In the divine order, speech usually corresponds to Sarasvati (or Vac), and mind to Sarasvat (or Prajapati).¹⁰⁵ In the human order, speech (= the *rathantara*) corresponds to the human faculty of speech or, in the social order, the Brahmin caste; mind (= the *brhat*) corresponds to the faculty of mind or the Ksatriya caste.¹⁰⁶ Finally, in the sacrificial order, speech is the Hotr priest or Agnihotra cow, and mind is the Adhvaryu priest or calf.¹⁰⁷ Different sets of correspondences and a number of variants also appear; wherever gender distinctions arise when such couplings are made, however, speech, Vac, is always female, and her mate is always male.¹⁰⁸

The connection that we have seen in the Samhitas between Vac and the primordial waters gains in importance in the Brahmanas and parallels the pattern that we have seen in Rg-Veda 1. 164. 41-42. In the process of cosmogony, Vac is sometimes described as the source of the cosmic waters, which are an aspect of Vac herself. This dynamic is recounted in Satapatha Brahmana 6. 1. 1. 9, cited above, where the primordial waters that Prajapati creates and in which are placed the primeval egg are fashioned from Vac and identified with her. In Pañcavimsa Brahmana 7. 7. 9, Vac is likened to an ocean (*samudra*); the use of the term *samudra* resonates with the use of the term in the Samhitas to indicate the primordial waters, thus implying that Vac is the

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waters present at the beginning of creation in an undifferentiated state. In other passages, however, Vac flows forth as streams of water that immediately become differentiated. In Pañcavimsa Brahmana 20. 14. 2, it is stated that Prajapati is alone in the beginning of creation. He sends forth speech, which flows upward as a stream:

Prajapati alone was here. Vac alone was his own; Vac was second to him. He thought, "Let me send forth this very Vac. She will spread forth, pervading all this. " He sent forth Vac. She spread forth, pervading all this. She extended upwards as a continuous stream of water. Saying "a, " he cut off a third of it. This became the earth (*bhumi*). . . . (Saying) "ka, " he cut off (another) third; this became the midregions (*antariksa*) . . . (Saying) "ho, " he threw a third upwards; it became the sky (*dyaus*).

These waters are not the undifferentiated matrix that we have seen in other narrations of cosmogony but represent the incipient stage of differentiated creation. Prajapati breaks off three different portions of this stream, each of which corresponds to a different syllable; these three portions then become the three manifest worlds. Creation thus results from the fullness of Vac when she pours forth as the waters that form the material foundation of the physical universe, either

as the primordial waters or as differentiated streams. Prajapati is the male creator principle, and Vac is the female principle that manifests itself as a primordial liquid flow.

We should note two further points about the coupling of the goddess Vac with Prajapati or the correlative linking of the faculty of speech with mind. First, Vac acquires a consort or male counterpart in the Brahmanas, which is not true in the Samhitas. When Prajapati is described as possessing Vac as his ability to speak or make manifest the contents of his mind, he then uses her to create. 109 In such

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contexts, Vac is Prajapati's inherent creative power in the same way that Suci/Indrani is Indra's inherent power. It is also notable that Prajapati is at least once identified with Daksa, 110 with whom or which, as a principle Aditi and the waters are associated in the Rg-Veda, although little else can be said about these relations. Second, Vac is consistently identified with the earth, and in the series of correspondences established in the Brahmanas, directly correlated with earth, whereas Prajapati is associated with mind and, correlatively, the heavens. These associations resonate with the representation of Prthivi and Dyaus, earth and heaven, as the primordial parental couple par excellence in the Samhitas.

Indrani

There is little in the Brahmanas on Indrani. One passage in the Satapatha Brahmana, however, is particularly relevant to our investigation. We have seen above the way in which correlations among different levels of reality are recognized in the Brahmanas. Such correlations establish correspondences between macrocosmic levels of reality and microcosmic levels. This applies also to Indra and Indrani. In Satapatha Brahmana 10. 5. 2. 9-12, Indra and Indrani are located on the microcosmic level in the human body:

Now, that one is Indra who is the man in the right eye, and this one [the other person] is Indrani. . . . Those two descend to the space in the heart. They copulate. When they come to the end of (their) union, then, indeed, that man sleeps; just as, having gone to the end of a union, a man (here on earth) is, as it were, not conscious, so that one [Indra] becomes as if he were not conscious. For this is a divine union; indeed, that is the highest bliss. Therefore, the mouth of a sleeping man is phlegmy, for those two deities then emit seed (*retas*) from which all this, whatever exists, springs.

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Indra is identified here with *prana*, 111 vital breath, although Indrani is not correlated with any other faculty. This union is also recounted in the Brhadaranyaka Upanisad, but in this account Indra, the person in the right eye, is mated with Viraj, who is identified as his wife.¹¹²

There are two important points to be noted regarding this passage. First, the coupling of Indra/Indrani is presented in terms that interpret the divine sexual union of the two deities on the level of human physiology. Thus Indra/Indrani, like Prajapati/Vac (= Sarasvat/Sarasvati), are correlated with the human order (*adhyatma*). The establishment of a macrocosmic/microcosmic correspondence between the sexual union of divinities and aspects of human physiology becomes important in the later development of Tantric notions concerning the concept of *sakti*. Second, the divine coupling of these two divinities is represented in this passage as having cosmogonic significance. It is from their union that "all this" (*idam sarvam*), that is, the manifest world, comes into being. Thus we see in this passage a repetition of the theme of cosmogonic sexual union characteristic of the portrayals of Prajapati/Vac. Here, however, it is Indra and Indrani who are the primordial creative couple.

In the Brahmanas, there is an increasing tendency toward abstraction of what are clearly identified in the Samhitas as female divinities. Elements are combined in different ways in different accounts of creation. The pattern that emerges reveals two distinct phases within the first stage of creation that Kuiper describes: (1) creation is impelled into motion by the interaction of a male creator figure, Prajapati, with his female counterpart or mate, Vac; (2) this interaction leads to the production of the primordial waters from or as Vac. The waters are then manipulated, and the manifest cosmos or earth is formed (Kuiper's second stage). Vac, the waters, and earth/Aditi are not clearly distinguished but

rather seem to be different aspects of the same feminine principle.

Upanisads

In the Upanisads, the basic framework established in the Brahmanas is affirmed, but consonant with the more reflective, rather than mythological, character of the Upanisads the abstract aspect of these structures is emphasized even more. Thus the same elements are in place but often devoid of gender distinction.

The emphasis in these texts is placed on speculation regarding an underlying substratum of all existence, Brahman or Atman. Brahman represents the ultimate principle of objectivity, and Atman represents the same principle on the subjective pole. Atman is also at times identified as the personal creator and therefore takes the place occupied by Prajapati in the Brahmanas. Because of their tendency toward more abstract, nonmythological reflection, the Upanisads are not greatly concerned with individual deities. Thus descriptions of goddesses such as those we have seen in the Samhitas and to a certain extent in the Brahmanas drop away; only the cosmological and cosmogonic structures remain as topics of concern. This shift in perspective will be reflected in our analysis, which will limit itself to those relevant elements that are important in the Upanisads, namely, the waters, the earth, and Vac.

The Waters

Although the waters lose their explicitly feminine identity in the Upanisads, they are still affirmed as the basic material matrix of creation. The world is described as being woven "warp and woof" on water (*ap*), and it is said that in the beginning the world was nothing but water. 113 In Aitareya Upanisad 1. 1. 1-2, a personal creator, identified here as Atman, is said to create the waters:

In the beginning, Atman, indeed, only one, existed no other blinking thing whatsoever. He thought, "Let me now create worlds. " He created these worlds: water (*ambhas*), rays of light (*marici*), death (*mara*), the waters (*ap*). That is the water, beyond heaven; heaven is its foundation. The rays of light are the midregions; death, the earth; what is beneath, the waters.

In this text, there is a clear distinction drawn between *ap* and *ambhas*; the waters (*ap*) are underneath the earth, whereas water (*ambhas*) is celestial, existing above heaven. The waters are also linked with the birth of the primal man, Purusa, whom Atman draws forth from the waters and from whom the cosmos is formed:

Extracting a person (*purusa*) right from the waters, he shaped (him). He heated him. The mouth of the one heated was separated out, like an egg. From the mouth, speech (*vac*) (was separated out); from speech, fire. 114

The association of the waters with gross matter reappears in Aitareya Upanisad 1. 3. 2, where Atman heats (*abhi* ~~it~~ *tap*) the waters and produces from them material form (*murti*).

The waters are manifest also in the human order in the form of a component derived from semen.¹¹⁵ Here, the waters are not primordial matter or the womb-like matrix from which Purusa is born, but the male fluid of generation. This identification is echoed in Aitareya Upanisad 1. 2. 4, where it is said that the waters become semen and enter the sexual organ of Purusa. The correspondence between cosmic creation and human procreation is described further in Aitareya Upanisad 2. 4. 1-3, where it is stated that a human is produced as an embryo, *garbha*, when semen is poured into a woman, who then bears the *garbha*. The same term, *purusa*, is used to describe both the cosmic person and the human person, suggesting a correlation between the two. Furthermore, the term *garbha*, which in earlier texts refers to the cosmic embryo/germ, is also

the term used to describe the human embryo. Finally, semen is explicitly connected with both the cosmic waters and human procreation.

Earth

Like the waters, the earth loses an explicit gender identification in the Upanisads, yet the basic cosmogonic and cosmological structures relating to earth endure. As in the Brahmanas, the earth is described in the Upanisads as derived from the primordial waters. In Brhadaranyaka Upanisad 1. 2. 1-2, which also forms part of the Satapatha Brahmana, 116 it is stated that the waters (ap) are produced while the creator is worshipping. The froth on the waters is then compacted and becomes the earth. Taittiriya Upanisad 2. 1 asserts that earth comes from water; in Chandogya Upanisad 1. 1. 2, it is said that the essence of earth is water, and in 7. 10. 1 it is stated that the earth along with the atmosphere, sky, gods, men, beasts, birds, and so on is just water (ap) solidified. Thus water is seen as the most abstract level of matter, and earth is a concrete manifestation of the waters.

Vac

In the Upanisads, the creative role of Prajapati and mind in conjunction with speech remains. In Brhadaranyaka Upanisad 1. 2. 4-5, which also forms part of the Satapatha Brahmana, 117 the interplay of the creator here represented by death or hunger but in essence a Prajapati-like figure and Vac/speech is described on two levels corresponding to the two stages of creation. Here, Vac is both the creator's divine consort and the faculty of speech itself:

He desired, "May a second self of me be produced!" With mind (*manas*), he death, hunger copulated with speech (*vac*). That which was semen, that became the year. . . . He bore him for a time as long as a year.

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After that long a time, he [death] begot him. He [death] opened his mouth to swallow the one born. He [the one born] cried, '*bhan!*' That became speech. He [death] thought, "If, indeed, I threaten him, I will make less food. " With that speech (*vac*), with that self, he created this whole world, whatever exists: The *rcs*, the *yajuses*, the *samans*, meters, sacrifices, men, cattle. 118

The creative role of Prajapati's speech is also affirmed in Maitri Upanisad 6. 6, where Prajapati calls forth the three worlds (earth, midregions, and sky) by speaking their names. The link between the faculties of speech and mind also persists in the Upanisads. Thus, in the passage above, for example, the creator copulates with Vac in her capacity as the faculty of speech by means of (his) mind. The connection between the two faculties is also affirmed in Brhadaranyaka Upanisad 1. 4. 17, where the creator, who is identified as Atman, is equated with mind, and Vac/speech is said to be his wife.

Although Vac's identity as a goddess is not emphasized in the Upanisads, it appears that she retains her femaleness as Prajapati's mate. The bovine symbolism of Vac also reappears in Brhadaranyaka Upanisad 5. 8, where it is said that one should revere Vac as a cow. The notion that the world manifests itself as a result of the relations between male and female creative elements persists despite the rather abstract character of most of the accounts of creation found in the Upanisads and is explicitly articulated in Brhadaranyaka Upanisad 1. 4. 1-4, where the incipient cosmos is described as the Self (Atman) alone in the form of a person. Feeling without delight, Atman desires a second, so he causes himself to fall into two pieces, therefore giving rise to a husband and a wife. These two copulate in different forms, thus spawning different types of creatures.

The penchant for correspondences among the different levels of reality that we have seen in the Brahmanas is also present in the Upanisads, and the correlation between

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speech and the earth persists. In Brhadaranyaka Upanisad 1. 5. 4, the links among speech/mind/breath are accommodated, and it is stated that this world is speech, the middle world is mind, and that (sky) world is breath. Earth is also said to be the body of speech, and as far as speech extends, so far extends the earth. 119 Thus speech is manifest materially as the

physical world.

As in the Brahmanas, Vac in these texts is the unmanifest activating principle that, through interaction with a creator figure, is projected forth and transformed into the manifest world. It is notable that in at least one passage Vac is identified with Viraj, who in the Atharva-Veda (see above) is also associated with energy and linked to materiality.¹²⁰

In the Upanisads, the cosmological and cosmogonic structures established in the Brahmanas persist. Although the descriptions of the process and nature of creation are not as concretely gender-specific as those accounts found in the Samhitas and Brahmanas, the basic symbolism remains the same. The feminine principle is both an activating principle and also the gross, abstract material from which the manifest cosmos is formed.

The Vedic materials are, in general, rather obscure and difficult to interpret with any certainty. Nevertheless, we can conclude our observations by noting that, vague though it may be, some sense of a feminine principle that forms part of both cosmogonic narrative (often in conjunction with a male consort figure) and cosmological speculation begins to emerge and take form in the Vedic literature. Different goddesses embody this feminine principle and represent its diverse manifestations. Thus we find, for example, that certain female divinities, such as the waters or the goddess earth, seem to be allied more with the material pole of creation, whereas others, such as Saci/Indrani or Vac, tend to be associated more vigorously with the enlivening, active principle of creation. Yet all of these various expressions of the feminine seem to be interrelated dimensions of a single

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principle that can be characterized as a kind of material energizing presence, a presence that both propels creation into being and also exists in embodied form as the physical cosmos itself.

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Chapter Two

Prakrti, Maya, And Sakti: The Feminine Principle In Philosophical Discourse

Our investigation began with an examination of Vedic associations of female divinity generally with materiality and energy. We will now turn to look at the formulation of the feminine in philosophical discourse as the principles *prakrti*, *maya*, and *sakti*.

The most elaborate and logically consistent descriptions of the nature and function of *prakrti*, *maya*, and *sakti* as principles are found in the literature of the major "orthodox" (*astika*) Brahmanical philosophical schools. These descriptions, however, are tied into a larger web of reflections in which they constitute strong but not exclusive threads. In exploring these three principles' many layers of meaning in philosophical discourse, as well as their various connotations and nuances, one must also look at relevant related materials. Thus our investigation will take us into not only philosophical literature but other kinds of literature as well.

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Prakrti

The Term Prakrti in Early Vedic, Grammatical, and Ritual Contexts

It is notable that the term *prakrti*, so important in later Brahmanical thought, does not occur at all in any of the Vedic Samhitas and appears to occur only once in the Brahmanas. ¹ It is found, however, in the Vedangas, the "limbs" or subsidiary texts of the Vedas, in both grammatical and ritual contexts. In these environments, the term has a technical meaning denoting the basic, uninflected, or unelaborated structure that can then be modified or embellished in different

ways in other contexts. In the former case, *prakṛti* means the primary, radical form of a word,² whereas in the latter it signifies the paradigmatic sacrifice on which other sacrifices are modeled.³ The similarity between these two senses of the term *prakṛti* is more than coincidental. Louis Renou has suggested that one can find many parallels between ancient grammatical formulations and those of ritual. He further suggests that the Sanskrit grammatical tradition draws upon notions prevalent in the Vedic ritual tradition and reapplies them with slightly different inflection. With respect to the term *prakṛti*, he notes:

Prakṛti means "base": the word is glossed *mula*, *yonī* (the commentary of Hiranyakesi-srautasūtra gives it as an equivalent of *nimitta* or of *karana*) and designates those rites that, once described, will not be repeated anymore when one will treat other ceremonies. It is with regard to *prakṛti* that *vikṛti* or variety, the "ectype" if one prefers with respect to the "archetype," is posited . . . The same meaning of "base" exists in the grammarians and the phoneticians: thus "radical" as opposed to *pratyaya*, or rather "original, primitive state" of a word as opposed to its "modified state" which is denoted by the term *vikṛti* and more often *vikara*. . . The usage of the term in grammar can be thus understood as a borrowing from ritual language.⁴

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The term *prakṛti* in the sense of "uninflected root" is also found in the Mimamsa-Sūtras. ⁵

There are two points that should be noted about the use of the term *prakṛti* in these contexts. First, the term seems to have ritual and linguistic significance but no explicitly stated cosmological implications. Second, the term *prakṛti* as it is used in these texts does not have any clear association with materiality. A form that is *prakṛti* is described as foundational in a structural, but not material, sense.⁶

It is not necessarily significant that we can find no evidence in these texts of any metaphysical reflection about *prakṛti* as a cosmic principle of materiality. The focus of the Samhitas is mainly mythological, although certain hymns are more philosophically oriented in nature than others; grammatical texts are concerned with language; and the Brahmanas and Mimamsa-Sūtras concern themselves mainly with Vedic ritual and proper performance of the sacrifice (*yajña*), so cosmological speculation articulated in these texts generally focuses on the ritual act. Thus one would not expect to find assertions regarding the nature of material reality in these texts since inquiry into this kind of problem does not fall within their domain. What is significant, however, is the use of the term *prakṛti* to express the fundamental state of the structure, either grammatical or ritual, which is of ultimate concern in these environments. The use of the term to indicate the foundational constituent on which all other related constituents are based and from which they are derived also applies to its use in later contexts.

The term *pradhana*, which in later texts is often used as a synonym for the term *prakṛti*, has a meaning in grammatical and ritual contexts that is quite different. Renou observes, for example, that the word *pradhana* indicates the "principle," as opposed to the "subordinate," position of a term. In a compound, *pradhana* denotes the principal member, the "determined" as opposed to the "determining" agent (for example, *purusa*, "man" as opposed to *rajan*, "king"

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in *rajabpurusa*, "king's man" or "king's servant"). In ritual contexts, the term designates the essential portions of a given ritual that give it its individual flavor and that vary from sacrifice to sacrifice. ⁷

Prakṛti as a Material Principle

The most systematic formulation of the concept of *prakṛti* as a principle of materiality is found in the Samkhya-Karika, the central treatise of the school of Brahmanical Hindu philosophy known as classical Samkhya. The Samkhya-Karika appears to have been compiled by Isvarakṛṣṇa around the fourth century C. E. Much of what the treatise expounds, however, including its doctrine of *prakṛti*, is rooted in earlier materials and traditions, including some of the Vedic materials explored in the previous chapter. In fact, the understanding of *prakṛti* as it is expressed in the Samkhya-Karika emerges out of the confluence of a variety of mythological, speculative, and philosophical streams of thought. Because of the close relationship between Samkhya's formulation of *prakṛti* as a material principle and the various elements to which this formulation is connected, it is impossible to separate the development of *prakṛti* as a material principle from the

historical evolution of Samkhya philosophy in general.

In order to place the understanding of *prakṛti* as it appears in its classical form in proper context, it is helpful to look at the historical development of the term and its meaning in different environments prior to the recording of the Sāmkhya-Karika. We will not examine every occurrence of the term *prakṛti* in the entire history of Indian literature but will rather focus on tracing the emergence of a notion of *prakṛti* as a principle of materiality that is a cosmogonic and cosmological abstraction. We will turn first to those pre-Samkhya texts and passages that relate directly to the Samkhya-Karika's later formulation of *prakṛti* as a principle of materiality, focusing particularly on lines of continuity between the Vedic materials that we have looked at and

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later materials. We will then turn to look at the Samkhya-Karika itself. As we shall see, in fact, there is much more narrative and structural similarity between some of the Vedic and epic materials and aspects of *prakṛti* in later philosophical materials than one might suspect.

Prakṛti in Vedic and Proto-Samkhya Contexts

In his discussion of the history of Samkhya philosophy, Gerald J. Larson distinguishes between two discernible stages of development prior to the emergence of the classical Samkhya expounded in the Samkhya-Karika: a period of ancient speculations (including the Vedic hymns and some of the oldest Upanisads, e. g. , the Brhadaranyaka, Chandogya, and Taittiriya, eighth or ninth-ca. fourth centuries B. C. E.), and a period of proto-Sāmkhya developments (including some of the middle Upanisads like the Svetasvatara, the *Caraka Samhita*, the Bhagavad-Gita, and the Moksadharma section of the Mahabharata, ca. fourth century B. C. E. to first century C. E.).⁸ In the first period, Samkhya as such is "nowhere to be found," but many motifs and ideas that are later assimilated into Samkhya contexts begin to emerge.⁹ In the second period, a definite Samkhya tradition starts to take shape, and many of the technical terms that are associated with later classical Samkhya also appear.¹⁰ Consistent descriptions of the nature and function of *prakṛti* as a material principle only begin to come to the fore in the period of proto-Sāmkhya. As we move out of the Vedic materials and into post-Vedic texts, we see an increasingly complex and distinctly proto-Sāmkhyan delineation of *prakṛti*, as well as an increasingly standardized description of its nature and function. Motifs related to the later understanding of *prakṛti* as a material principle, however, can be traced back even to the Vedic Samhitas.¹¹

As we have already seen, several passages in the Vedic texts postulate the existence of a primordial, undifferentiated matrix of water that forms the material basis of

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creation, and the similarities between Vedic portrayals of the cosmic waters and later descriptions of *prakṛti* are striking. Both are abstract, cosmic principles of materiality. The motif of evolution that is associated with the function of the waters in creation also comes up in later descriptions of *prakṛti*. In proto-Samkhya and Samkhya materials *prakṛti*, like the waters of Vedic cosmogonies, evolves from its primordial state of non-differentiation to a differentiated state and gives rise to various forms.

Other Vedic cosmogonic motifs and structures also have counterparts in later materials concerning *prakṛti*. In the Samhitas and Brahmanas, for example, accounts of cosmogony sometimes describe the evolution or emergence of the waters from heat (*tapas*): thus in Rg-Veda 10. 190 it is said that heat (*tapas*) generates the cosmic waters in the form of an ocean (*samudra*), and in Satapatha Brahmana 6. 1. 3 Prajapati performs austerities (*tapas*), and when he becomes heated (*tap*), the waters are produced from him.¹² The Upanisads articulate a similar motif, only they tend to replace the term *tapas* with *tejas*, which can mean heat or fire, or *agni*, which means fire. The Taittiriya Upanisad, for example, states that water comes from fire (*agni*).¹³ In later classical Samkhya, as we shall see, a similar sequence is expressed in the evolution from *prakṛti* of the elements, where the element water is said to evolve from the element fire (*tejas*). Furthermore, in its capacity as the source of the cosmic waters, heat or fire is the more abstract equivalent of speech (*vac*), which, as we have also seen, sometimes is described as the waters' source; in fact, the correlation between heat/fire and speech is recognized in the Chandogya Upanisad, where it is stated that the minutest particles of fire (*tejas*) become speech when fire is eaten and that speech consists of fire.¹⁴ The word used here, *tejas*, means not only heat or fire, but

also power, and both heat or fire and speech are portrayed in a general way as sources of creative power that produce or evolve into the cosmic waters. This motif of a principle of creative energy or power

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giving rise to a principle of primordial materiality also has parallels in later Puranic literature where, as we shall see, *sakti* gives rise to *prakṛti*.

The heat/fire-to-water sequence is picked up and elaborated in the description of cosmogony found in Chandogya Upanisad 6. 2. 1-4.

In the beginning, this (world) was Being (*sat*) only, one only, without a second. . . . It thought, "Let me be many! Let me procreate!" It sent forth (*srj*) fire (*tejas*). That fire thought, "Let me be many! Let me procreate!" It discharged water (*ap*). . . . Those waters thought, "Let me be many! Let me procreate!" They discharged food (*anna*). 15

The description of Being addressing its desire to create by sending forth fire directly parallels the description of creation in Pañcavimsa Brahmana 7. 6. 1-3, where Prajapati addresses his desire to reproduce by producing a thought and sending it forth through speech. Thus we again see the correlation between heat/fire and speech. Yet it is especially notable that the evolutionary sequence in this passage includes a third element, food, for water becomes food (*anna*). The transformation of water into food parallels the transformation of water into earth in many of the Vedic passages explored in the previous chapter, implying a loosely analogous relationship between food and earth.¹⁶ The sequence of evolution from fire to water to food also has parallels in later materials where the elements fire, water, and earth are the last three principles to emerge from *prakṛti*. It is quite likely that the placement of fire, water, and earth as the final three elements in the successive evolution of the elements in proto-Samkhya and later classical Samkhya is directly influenced by the older Vedic schemes, which identify heat or fire as the source of water, and water as the immediate material source of earth and/or the material cosmos in the unfolding of creation.

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The basic tripartite division of a single primordial substance into heat/fire, water, and food is also repeated in other Upanisadic passages and adumbrates related themes that come up in later proto-Samkhya and Samkhya. Chandogya Upanisad 6. 4. 1. 1-5, for example, establishes correspondences among the three evolutes heat/fire, water, and food and the three colors red, white, and black. Chandogya Upanisad 6. 4. 6 then generalizes the relationship between the colors and the three evolutes:

Which red form is in fire (*agni*), that is the form of heat/fire (*tejas*); which (form is) white, that (is the form) of water (*ap*); which (form is) dark, that (is the form) of food (*anna*) They knew that which was as if red, that (was) the form of heat. They knew that which was as if white, that was the form of water. They knew that which was as if dark, that was the form of food.

The correspondences established in this passage have later counterparts in classical Samkhya, where *prakṛti* is described as comprising three *gunas*, "strands, " which are *prakṛti*'s constituent parts: *sattva*, the *guna* of purity; *rajas*, the *guna* of activity; and *tamas*, the *guna* of lethargy. ¹⁷ In Samkhya, white is associated with the *guna sattva*, red is associated with *rajas*, and black is associated with *tamas*. The Svetasvatara Upanisad, which is somewhat later than the Chandogya Upanisad,¹⁸ also refers to the same three colors and portrays them as constituting an "unborn female" (*aja*), who is described as the foundational principle that produces other constituents like her:

With the one unborn female (*aja*), who is red, white, and black, (and) who sends forth (√*srj*) many creatures having the same form (as her), there lies the one unborn male taking his pleasure.¹⁹

The description of this unborn principle sounds like Renou's description of *prakṛti* in ritual and grammatical

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literature as denoting an "archetype" from which the "ectypes" are derived (above). Furthermore, the portrayal of a unique female principle consisting of the colors red, white, and black (the colors of the *gunas*) and sending forth creatures having the same form as herself also parallels later descriptions of *prakṛti* that identify *prakṛti* as an uncreated female principle of materiality from which other material forms evolve.

The Svetasvatara Upanisad passage quoted above mentions an unborn male who lies with the female, "taking his pleasure, " and these two unborn principles are also described as "two birds, bound companions" who "clasp the same tree. " 20 The pairing of male/female consorts is, as we have seen, not uncommon in the Vedic texts. But the impersonal nature of this description and the designation of the two as "unborn" set this passage apart from the others that we have explored in the previous chapter, for the two take on a character that is more abstract than the male/ female pairs we have seen portrayed in other contexts. This pairing resonates with an equally impersonal pairing described in another Upanisad, the Maitri. Here, *prakṛti* is portrayed as the object of enjoyment consisting of three *gunas* and is contrasted with the person (*purusa*) who enjoys her:

The person abides inside matter (*pradhana*). That very one is an enjoyer; thus he enjoys/eats (*bhuj*) the food derived from nature (*prakṛta anna*). This self consisting of the elements, indeed, is his food. Its maker is matter (*pradhana*). Therefore, that which is to be enjoyed consists of three qualities (*gunas*), and the enjoyer is the person who abides inside. . . . Therefore, the person is the enjoyer, nature (*prakṛti*) is what is to be enjoyed. Standing in it, he thus enjoys. . . . The enjoyer of it (*prakṛti*) is without qualities (*nirguna*).21

It is difficult to discern whether the term *guna* in this passage is being used in a generic sense to mean "quality"

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in general or whether it is meant to refer specifically to the technical designation of the three *gunas* as the three "strands" or constituent aspects of *prakṛti* (*sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*). In any case, *purusa*, the enjoyer of *prakṛti*, is said to be without qualities or "strands" (*nirguna*), whereas *prakṛti* consists of three qualities or "strands" that are not named. The pairing of the unborn male with the unborn female and the pairing of *purusa* and *prakṛti* in these passages hint at the standard pairing in later classical Samkhya of *purusa*, the principle of pure consciousness, with *prakṛti*, the principle of materiality consisting of its three *gunas* (*sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*) from which *purusa* always remains distinct. It is also notable that this last passage plays upon the relationship between *prakṛti* and food (*anna*). The "enjoyer" is said to eat or enjoy (*bhuj*) food derived from *prakṛti*, but is also said to eat or enjoy *prakṛti* itself. The doubling of food and *prakṛti* adumbrates some kind of analogous relationship between the two.

Svetasvatara Upanisad 4. 9-10 contains another reference that is relevant to our investigation. This passage equates *prakṛti* with the principle of *maya* and describes God as the possessor of this *maya*:

Sacred hymns, sacrifices, sacrificial rituals, ordinances, the past, the future, and what the Vedas say, all this is created by the possessor of *maya* (*mayin*) from this, and in it the other is confined by *maya*. 22

Know thus that *prakṛti* is *maya*; the Great Lord (Mahesvara) then is the possessor of *maya* (*mayin*). Verily, all this world is pervaded by beings (*bhuta*) that are parts of Him.

We will examine the concept of *maya* more closely at a later point in this chapter. Suffice it to say for now that *maya* in the Upanisads is often conceived in conjunction with *prakṛti*. In the passage above, *prakṛti/maya* is not independent from God but is, rather, under God's control. This is also implied in 6.2:

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(He) by whom this whole (world) is eternally covered, the knower, the time-maker, the possessor of the *gunas* who is the all-knower, controlled by that one, this work (*karman*, = the world) revolves, (which) is thought (to be) earth, water, fire, air, and ether.

This passage also enumerates the five principles that classical Samkhya later lists as the five gross elements: earth, water,

fire, air, and ether. Elsewhere, *maya* is again mentioned, this time in relation to the term *pradhana*. 23

What is perishable is *pradhana*. What is immortal and imperishable is Hara. One god (*deva*) rules both the perishable (*pradhana*) and the self (*atman*). From meditation on him, from uniting (with him), and from (realizing his) true being still more, there is finally cessation from all *maya*.

Here, the term *pradhana* seems to have the force of the meaning that we would also associate with the term *prakrti*; that is, it seems to mean the material, manifest cosmos. *Maya* in this passage is often interpreted to mean illusion, and the relationship between *pradhana* and *maya* is not explicitly articulated. Yet there seems to be an important connection between the two principles. This becomes clearer when one explores the context in which this material is found. Immediately prior to this passage, Brahman is described as having three aspects: the knowing, omnipotent one (God, the supreme Self), the unknowing, impotent enjoyer (the self, *atman*), and that which is connected with the enjoyer (the world, or *prakrti/pradhana*). All three are described as unborn (*aja*):

That (which is) joined together is perishable and imperishable, manifest and unmanifest. The Lord (Isa) supports it all. And without the Lord, the self is bound because of its nature as an enjoyer. Knowing God (*deva*), (it) is released from all bonds. The two unborn ones (are the) knowing (Lord) and the unknowing

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(self), the powerful and the impotent. That female one is also unborn, who is united with the enjoyer and objects of enjoyment. 24

Without God (Isa), the self (*atman*) is bound because it is an enjoyer; by knowing God, it is released from all bonds. What are these bonds (*pasa*)? Since the self is bound by being an enjoyer, and the object of enjoyment is a feminine entity, presumably *prakrti*, the fetters must be those created by the involvement of the self with that entity. By knowing God, there is release from these fetters. The force of this passage is essentially the same as that of the immediately following passage, 1. 10 cited above, which states that through meditation on God, there is cessation from *maya*. Some kind of parallel between involvement with *prakrti/pradhana* on the one hand and *maya* on the other is therefore indicated.

The relationship between *prakrti* and *maya* in these texts is important. As we shall see, although these two principles will be differentiated in later philosophical literature, there is not always a clear-cut distinction between them in these earlier contexts. They are sometimes explicitly equated, as in Svetasvatara Upanisad 4. 10 above, but this is not always the case. We will look at this problem more closely at a later point in this chapter.

The Marriage of Vedic and Proto-Samkhya Materials in the Mahabharata

What is perhaps most interesting for our investigation is to explore some of the ways in which the concept of a fundamental material principle presented along discernible proto-Samkhya lines develops in post-Vedic literature with respect to the Vedic elements that we have already explored. Although many post-Vedic texts do not concern themselves at all with Vedic narratives, others do. This is most clearly the case in the Mahabharata, especially in the

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Moksadharma portion of the Santi-Parvan and the Bhagavad-Gita, but elsewhere as well. Because of its composite nature and the diversity of its contents, the Mahabharata includes Vedic, post-Vedic philosophical, and non-Vedic mythological material, and it often attempts to weave diverse strands of thought into a single cloth. This is in fact what happens with respect to reflections regarding the nature of materiality. Thus we find that assertions about a material principle in terms and categories that fit a discernible proto-Samkhya mold exist side by side with assertions that seem contradictory or attempt to combine these categories with those of the older Vedic literature.

The proto-Samkhya materials in the Mahabharata, like those found in other proto-Samkhya environments, posit a material principle that has a variety of names. This principle is sometimes referred to as *prakrti* but also quite often is called *avyakta* ("the unmanifest"), *pradhana* ("the originator"), *sattva* ("purity"), and other names as well. The term

prakṛti itself frequently is used to denote an eightfold entity consisting of a material principle designated as *prakṛti* plus seven other principles that evolve out of it: *mahat* ("the great principle, " a synonym of *buddhi* or intellect), *ahamkāra*, ("egoity"), and the five gross elements ether, wind or air, fire, water, and earth. In later classical Samkhya, the five gross elements are the last of several evolutes to evolve from *prakṛti* and come forth in this precise order, but this is not always the case in the Mahabharata, as we shall see. Several passages in the epic also mention sixteen *vikaras* or secondary modifications of *prakṛti*: *manas* or "mind, " hearing, touching, seeing, tasting, smelling, speaking, grasping, walking, excreting, procreating, sound, contact, form, taste, and smell. In later classical Samkhya, these last fifteen principles are said to be the five sense capacities (*buddhindriya*), action capacities (*karmendriya*), and subtle elements (*tanmatra*). The eight portions of *prakṛti* along with the sixteen secondary modifications are sometimes designated as twenty-four essential principles of material reality called *tattvas*, but different

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passages in the epic propose different numbers of *tattvas*.²⁵ Some passages count *purusa*, "consciousness, " as the unmanifest part of *prakṛti*, but others include *purusa* in the list of *tattvas* as a twenty-fifth principle. The list of twenty-five *tattvas* that we find in some passages of the Mahabharata corresponds to the twenty-five *tattvas* of later classical Samkhya. *Prakṛti* and *purusa* are sometimes paired in the epic, and where this occurs, the text often refers to them with the terms *ksetra*, "field, " and *ksetrajña*, "knower of the field. " As we shall see, some passages in the epic even postulate a twenty-sixth principle, a supreme Absolute, which is the ultimate source of all the others.²⁶

In many of the sections of the Mahabharata where we find proto-Samkhya materials related to the understanding of *prakṛti* as a material principle, these materials are woven together with corresponding Vedic materials. The Bhīṣma-Parvan of the Mahabharata, for example, asserts the supremacy of the earth as a primordial material principle, echoing the Vedic theme of the earth as supreme mother and material matrix of creation. Thus we find in Bhīṣma-Parvan 5. 20-21:27

Everything is born from the earth and everything disappears into the earth. The earth is the foundation of (all) creatures, (and) the earth alone is (their) final resort. He that has the earth has the entire world with its inanimate and animate population.

This praise of earth as the totality of creation appears entirely without reference to proto-Samkhya categories. Then, a bit further, in section 6. 3-5,²⁸ earth is described in relation to the four other gross elements of proto-Samkhya descriptionwater, wind, fire, and spaceand their qualities, sound, touch, form, taste, and smell, five of the secondary modifications of *prakṛti*:

O great king (Dhṛtarāṣṭra), all things present in the world have been said by the wise to be equal to the five

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elementsearth (*bhūmī*), water (*ap*), wind (*vāyu*), fire (*agni*), and space (*ākāśa*)on account of accumulation. (That is,) they all possess the qualities of the superior (element). Earth is the foremost (*pradhānatas*) of them. Sound (*śabda*), touch (*sparsa*), form (*rūpa*), taste (*rasa*), and scent (*gandha*)these are said by seers (*ṛṣis*) acquainted with the truth to be the qualities of earth.

The importance of the earth is now explained and justified using a schema that contains elements clearly related to the categories of proto-Samkhya. Earth is foremost because it contains all five of the possible qualities mentioned, qualities that correspond to the five subtle elements (*tanmatras*) recognized both elsewhere in the epic itself and in later classical Samkhya. 29

The combination in the epic of proto-Samkhya principles with older Vedic elements is especially notable with respect to reflections regarding the evolution of the cosmos from its primordial material state. The water cosmology that we have seen throughout the Vedic texts persists in the Mahabharata, but there is now an attempt to recast it and integrate it with proto-Samkhya materials regarding cosmology and cosmogony, which describe the evolution from *prakṛti* of the other twenty-three material *tattvas* and tend to count the five gross elementsether, wind or air, fire, water, and earthas the last of the evolutes. The Vedic understanding of the waters as the primordial matrix present at the beginning of creation is

merged with the placement of the waters toward the end of the unfolding of creation in the proto-Samkhya system. This is especially evident in the Moksadharma section of the Santi-Parvan, where proto-Samkhya categories play the greatest role.

In the Moksadharma, cosmogony is also often discussed in conjunction with the opposite process, dissolution. As the cosmos emanates forth, so it will be dissolved in a process that reverses the order of emanation. Each principle flows forth from the one that precedes it and will

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dissolve back into that same principle. Since much of the material regarding the role of the waters is found in passages describing dissolution, not creation, we will explore these passages as well, always bearing in mind that this process mirrors that of cosmogony.

There are several passages in the Moksadharma where the gross material universe is described as emerging out of the primordial waters. In 12. 176. 2-16, 30 for example, which is included in the Moksadharma, water is said to be the foundation of all that exists. In this passage, however, the five gross elements (space, wind, fire, water, and earth) are now introduced into the narrative:

Bhrgu said: Manasa produced the varied creation of beings by means of his mind (*manas*). First off, he created water (*jala*) for the stimulation (*samdhuksana*) of creatures. Water is that which is the breath of all creatures, by means of which beings grow, and deprived of which all perish. The whole universe is pervaded by it [water]. The earth, mountains, clouds, and all other things that have form should all be known again as related to water as (that which forms when) the waters (*ap*) become solid (*√stambh*).

Bharadvaja said: How did the waters (*salila*) spring up? And how (did) fire and wind (arise)? And how was the earth created? I have great doubts about these points. Bhrgu said: Formerly, in the Brahmakalpa, oh holy one, when the Brahmanical seers (*brahmarsi*) were gathered together, doubt about the creation of the world arose in these great souls. Taking up contemplation, remaining silent and immovable, abandoning food, consuming (only) air, the twice-born ones ruled (*ati √stha*) for a thousand celestial years. A righteous voice (*vani*), the divine Sarasvati, arose there from out of the firmament (and) reached the ears of them all: "Formerly, there was only infinite space (*akasa*), completely tranquil, soundless, motionless, and immovable. Without moon,

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sun, or wind, it was as if asleep. Then the waters (*salila*) sprang into existence. . . . Then from the pressure of the waters (*salila*) arose wind (*marut*). . . . Then in that friction of wind and water, blazing heat (*tejas*) possessed of great might arose. . . . Joined together with the wind, fire (*agni*) drew space and water together. That fire, from combining with the wind, became solidified. While falling from space, its liquid part (*sneha*) became hard and became the earth. "

The order in which the gross elements are cited as appearing is different from that of the standard order of evolution: ether, wind or air, fire, water, and earth. asserted elsewhere in the text and in later classical Samkhya. This passage places the appearance of water before that of wind (*marut/vayu*) and fire. Although space (*akasa*) comes first, the succession given in this passage gives primacy to water, for space is simply the backdrop against which the drama of creation unfolds. Thus this narrative effectively integrates older Vedic cosmogonic elements with proto-Samkhya elements by retaining the primacy of the waters in the process of emanation but including the waters in the list of elements that is found in proto-Samkhya and in later classical Samkhya. The Brahmana motif concerning the creative role of thought is also picked up in this passage, for the creator Manasa, the equivalent of Prajapati in the Brahmanas, creates the waters with his mind. There are also faint echoes in this passage of the creative relationship between thought and speech established in the Brahmanas, for the seers' contemplations stimulate the appearance on the scene of a celestial voice that, while not directly involved in cosmogony, recounts a cosmogonic narrative. Furthermore, the voice is likened to Sarasvati, who in the Brahmanas is equated with the goddess of speech, Vac.

The primacy of water as the material foundation of the gross, manifest universe is again reconciled with proto-Samkhya

motifs in 12. 195. 1-2. 31 In this passage, however,

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there are two distinct stages of cosmic evolution. In the first stage, subtle principles, such as wind and light, emerge. The end of this stage is marked by the appearance of water. In the second stage, gross creation, the universe itself, flows forth.

Manu said: From the imperishable (*aksara*) sprang space (*kha*); from came wind (*vayu*); from wind came light (*jyotis*); from light came water (*jala*); from water sprang the world; and from the world, that which moves in it. These, along with (their) bodies, go first to water; and from water, heat, wind, and space (are also gone to).

This passage adheres to the more standard order of the gross elements' manifestation that we find in proto-Samkhya and classical Samkhya but affirms the important place of water as the source of the material cosmos. At the time of dissolution the order of emanation is reversed, and the entire cosmos withdraws back into the principle or principles from which it originally came. Thus in this passage, the entire universe not only springs from water but disappears back into it when creation is dissolved.

The place of water in the dissolution of the universe against a backdrop of proto-Samkhya categories occurs again in 12. 224. 74-225. 9. 32 Here again, there are two distinct stages of dissolution. In the first stage, all of gross creation is absorbed back first into earth and then into the waters, which alone remain. In the second stage, more subtle principles are dissolved:

I will now convey the dissolution of the world at the beginning of the night, when the day is gone, in which way the supreme Self (Adhyatma), Isvara, makes this all extremely subtle. As suns burn in the sky, in that way fire burns with seven flames. Then the whole world, filled with flames, blazes forth.

Vyasa said: All things on the earth, (both) mobile and immobile, first disappear and merge into the earth.³³

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After all mobile and immobile things are dissolved, then earth, having no timber or grass, looks like a tortoise shell. Water takes up odor (*gandha*), the quality of earth. When odor is taken up, it [the earth] is fit for dissolution. The waters (*ap*) then abide. Billowy and producing great noise, having filled this all, they both remain still and move about. Then, oh dear one, light (*jyotis*) takes up the qualities of water. And when the qualities of water are taken up, then (the waters) come to rest in light. When the flames of fire conceal the sun standing in the middle, the sky, filled with flames, blazes forth. When wind (*vayu*) takes up form (*rupa*), the quality of light, then light disappears. The great wind moves violently. . . . When space (*akasa*) swallows up touch (*sparsa*), the quality of wind, then wind disappears. . . . When space takes up sound (*sabda*). . . .

The process of dissolution ends when all existent creatures are withdrawn into Brahman. In all of these passages, the place of water as the immediate source of the cosmos is neatly absorbed into the identifiably proto-Samkhyan schema of the evolution of gross elements that is found in this portion of the epic and that is assimilated into later classical Samkhya. It is evident that the Moksadharma self-consciously attempts to weave Vedic and proto-Samkhya motifs and patterns together.

The dissolution of the known world into water is one stage of dissolution, that of the gross world, but the introduction of proto-Samkhya elements into the cosmological system requires a higher stage of emanation and/or dissolution in which those aspects of creation that are not included in the schema of gross elements are also created or dissolved. Thus many of the narratives in the Moksadharma stressing dissolution include another level culminating in the complete absorption of all elements, both gross and subtle, manifest and unmanifest, into a single, ultimate, nonmaterial principle that is the most subtle of all. This

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principle is usually identified as Brahman or Purusa. The schemes presented in these passages do not appear to recognize any ultimate autonomous principle of materiality, for all of material creation is ultimately reabsorbed. In 12. 224-225 cited above, for example, after the material cosmos dissolves into water, there is a further stage of dissolution that results in complete absorption of everything into Brahman. A similar pattern is presented in 12. 326. 30, 34 where everything ultimately dissolves first into *prakṛti* and then into *purusa*. Elsewhere the distinction between the two phases of dissolution collapses, and the waters take the place of undifferentiated Brahman. In 12. 329. 3,35 for example:

At the time of dissolution at the end of four thousand *yugas*, when all creatures, mobile and immobile, disappear into the unmanifest [*prakṛti*], when light, earth, and wind disappear, when there is intense darkness, when the world is nothing but an expanse of water, when (the world) is overcome with darkness (*tamas*), when the one possessing consciousness (*samjñaka*) stands without second, when it is neither day nor night, when there is neither existence (*sat*) nor nonexistence (*asat*), when neither manifest (*vyakta*) nor unmanifest (*avyakta*) exists, at the time of that state . . . imperishable Hari, who is Purusa,³⁶ appeared from that eternal darkness (*tamas*).

In this passage, the waters become identified with the ultimate, unmanifest, undifferentiated source of the manifest, differentiated cosmos, a description that also applies to the principle of materiality (*avyakta*, and so forth) of proto-Samkhya. But the waters are also said to exist prior to the appearance of the unmanifest (= *prakṛti*) and are said to be the matrix from which Purusa, who is here identified as Hari (Visnu), appears. In other passages of the Moksadharma, that which transcends both *prakṛti* and *purusa* and is their source is undifferentiated Brahman. The de-

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scription of the waters presented here is reminiscent of Rg-Veda 129. 1-3, where the primordial waters are said to be present at the dawn of creation, before the distinction between existence (*sat*) and nonexistence (*asat*), when darkness is hidden by darkness. 37

Elsewhere the identification of water as an ultimate principle of materiality is asserted even outside of any context concerning the processes of creation or dissolution. Thus in 12. 180. 22,38 two principles are described, here identified as Brahman and physical form, which is derived from water:

All this is composed of water alone. Water (*ap*) is the form of all embodied creatures. There (in that water) is the mental Self, Brahman, the maker of all (abiding) in all things.

In this passage, water seems to be an all-pervading material principle and, along with Brahman, the second existential description that would also fit the *prakṛti* and *purusa* of classical Samkhya, as we shall see.

In all of these passages cited above, even when the waters are not identified with some ultimate principle, their function is nevertheless quite similar to that of the ultimate principle of materiality *avyakta*, *prakṛti*, *pradhana*, *sattva*, and so forth described in the epic's proto-Samkhya speculation. When the waters are presented as the material matrix of gross, manifest (*vyakta*) creation, their role as foundation or substratum echoes that of the primordial, subtle, unmanifest (*avyakta*) material matrix described in other contexts.

Although the identification of the two ultimate principles, *purusa* and *prakṛti*, with gender categories in later classical Samkhya is dubitable, we find several assertions in the Moksadharma associating primordial materiality with femaleness. In 12. 292. 27,39 for example, *prakṛti* is referred to as *devi*, which may be an adjective meaning "divine" or a noun meaning "goddess." In 12. 293. 12ff. ,⁴⁰ the relationship be-

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tween male and female is compared with that of *purusa* and *prakṛti* (here in the sense of ultimate principle of materiality) who are described as the imperishable (*aksara*) and the perishable (*ksara*):

Janaka said: Oh Bhagavan, the relation (*sambandha*) of those two, the imperishable (*aksara*) and the perishable (*ksara*), is regarded as that between male and female. The relation is said to be the same. Here, a female cannot conceive an embryo without a male, just as a male cannot create form without a female. Because of their union

with one another, and because of the attachment of each to the attributes of the other, form arises.

Elsewhere, the terms *ksetra* and *ksetrajña*, which are used to describe the two ultimate principles of proto-Samkhya reflection, are associated with human women and men:

By nature (*prakṛti*), women are like *ksetra*, and men are characteristically *ksetrajña*. 41

Thus there is evidence that in the Moksadharma the principle of materiality is associated with female gender.

The Bhagavad-Gita, which forms part of the Bhisma-Parvan or sixth book of the Mahabharata, also seems to identify the source of material creation with feminine attributes. Bhagavad-Gita 14. 3, for example, describes the female sexual organ (*yonī*) of God (Bhagavan), which is called the great *brahman* (*mahat brahman*), in which God places the seed that is the origin of all beings. As the source of creation, the *mahat brahman* here functions like *prakṛti*, although the two are not explicitly equated.⁴²

In the Bhagavad-Gita generally, the identity of *prakṛti* as the term used to designate an abstract, ultimate principle of materiality is more firmly established than in the Moksadharma. The precise nature of this principle is nevertheless still too slippery to grasp with any confidence. Surendra-

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nath Dasgupta identifies in the Gita two senses of the term, which he sees as designating (1) a primary and ultimate category and (2) an aspect of God's being. He also asserts that the two are not necessarily incommensurable, for *prakṛti* as an ultimate principle may simply be the hypostatization of God's nature. ⁴³ The text itself identifies two different levels of meaning of the term:

This [*buddhi*, *ahamkara*, *manas*, and the five gross elements] is the lower (*prakṛti*), but know here my other, higher *prakṛti* consisting of souls (*jīvas*), by which this universe is sustained, O Mighty-Armed One.⁴⁴

Both lower and higher forms of the created universe are aspects of God.

The relation between God and *prakṛti* in this passage echoes the similar relation between God and *prakṛti* that we saw in the Svetasvatara Upanisad, where God (Mahesvara) is described as possessing *prakṛti/maya*.⁴⁵ Like this Upanisad, too, the Gita also establishes some kind of connection between the terms *prakṛti* and *maya*, although it is not clear in this case precisely what kind of connection is implied. Thus in 4. 6:

Although unborn, having an imperishable self, although being Lord of Creatures, having taken control of my own *prakṛti*, I come into being by my own *maya*.

The nature of the relationship between *prakṛti* and *maya* in this passage remains a puzzle, although both are designated as belonging to God and both are cited in relation to the process of God's coming into being. Elsewhere (7. 14), the identity of the two seems to be implied when *maya* is described as consisting of *gunas*, which are normally cited in the Gita as attributes of *prakṛti*:

This my *maya* is indeed divine, consisting of *gunas*, difficult to penetrate; those who take refuge in me only, they transcend this *maya*.

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We will discuss further the meaning and importance of the relationship between *prakṛti* and *maya* at a later point in this chapter.

Prakṛti in Classical Samkhya

A number of the diverse threads of reflection that we have seen scattered throughout ancient and proto-Samkhya materials are brought together in the normative system of classical Samkhya expounded in Isvarakṛṣṇa's Samkhya-

Karika.

The Samkhya-Karika posits two ultimate and opposing ontological principles, *purusa* and *prakrti*. There are a multitude of different *purusas*, but there is only one *prakrti*. Both are uncreated and eternal. *Purusa* is the principle of consciousness; it is inactive and incapable of creative activity. *Prakrti* is the principle of materiality and is the basis for all activity and creation. *Prakrti* is the original "ground" or "stuff" from which all other products are derived and, as previously mentioned, is composed of three basic *gunas* or "strands," namely, *sattva*, the principle of purity, *rajas*, the principle of activity, and *tamas*, the principle of lethargy. As in proto-Samkhya, these three *gunas* or strands together constitute the basic tendencies inherent within *prakrti*. All three are necessary components of the manifest world, which arises through their mutual interaction. Yet because of their different characters, they are continually in tension with one another. 46

When the *gunas* are in equilibrium, *prakrti* is said to be in an unmanifest (*avyakta*) state and is also called *mulaprakrti* or *pradhana*. When the *gunas* are stirred, *prakrti* becomes manifest. The process of evolution brings about the manifest (*vyakta*) world consisting of twenty-three essential principles or *tattvas* that evolve out of *mulaprakrti* in an established order: first *buddhi* ("intellect"; also called *mahat*), then *ahamkara* ("egoity") followed by *manas* ("mind"), then five *buddhindriyas* ("sense capacities": hearing, touching, seeing, tasting, smelling), five *karmendriyas* ("organs of action" or

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"action capacities": speaking, grasping, walking, excreting, procreating), five *tanmatras* ("subtle elements": sound, contact, form, taste, smell), and five *mahabhutas* ("gross elements": ether, air, fire, water, earth). 47 These twenty-three principles plus *prakrti* and *purusa* together constitute the twenty-five *tattvas*, the same twenty-five that are enumerated in some of the proto-Samkhya materials of the Mahabharata. The process of emergence or "evolution" of the entities or *tattvas* that are derived from *prakrti* is determined by the respective dominance of each of the three *gunas*. The first, for example, *buddhi* or intellect, is characterized by a predominance of *sattva*. The *tanmatras* or subtle elements, which provide the essence of the gross physical world, are characterized by a predominance of *tamas*. 48

In its unmanifest (*avyakta*) state, *prakrti* is the cause of the manifest cosmos, the singular, ultimate source of all material forms. Though imperceptible, it can be inferred from the existence of its effects, the above-listed twenty-three *tattvas* that constitute the basis of the phenomenal world. 49 The initial impulse toward manifestation is produced by the stirring up of the *gunas*. The cosmos itself is the final effect of *prakrti*'s evolution; it results from a transformation of primordial materiality into a manifest, differentiated state and is preexistent in latent form in *mulaprakrti*. This doctrine of causation upholds the preexistence of the effect in the cause and is known in Indian philosophy as *satkaryavada*. Although the created cosmos, the effect, is inherent in *prakrti*, the cause, and results from transformation of the cause, the production of the world does not exhaust *mulaprakrti*, which continues to exist eternally in its *avyakta* state.

Mulaprakrti is capable of transformation because it possesses the power or *sakti* of manifestation (*pravrtti*) by means of which it is able to evolve and produce its effect. According to Samkhya-Karika 15 and 16, the unmanifest (*avyakta*) is called the cause (*karana*) of the manifest world in part because of this power (*sakti*):

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Because of the measuring out of specific things (in the world); because of regular order (in the world); and because of (its) power (*sakti*) of manifestation (*pravrtti*); because of the distinction between (the) cause and (its) effect; because of the undividedness of the diverse world; the unmanifest (*avyakta*) is the cause. And it is set into motion from the interaction of the three *gunas*, which are modified like water (*salila*), due to the particular nature abiding in each of the respective *gunas*. 50

The manifest cosmos made up of manifold entities consisting of different combinations of the *gunas* emerges from *mulaprakrti* when it transforms from its primordial state to its manifest form by means of its *sakti*. Thus in the Samkhya-Karika, the term *sakti* is used to designate the capacity of *prakrti* to unfold and is an aspect of *prakrti* itself. It is perhaps significant that the three *gunas* of *prakrti*, which are modified when the process of transformation is set in motion, are in this capacity compared to water (*salila*). As we have seen, the term *salila* and other such terms are used in the Vedic literature and in the Mahabharata to designate the primordial waters that form the foundation of the created universe and

that are manipulated or modified in some way at the beginning of the creative process. Like the three *gunas*, the waters form the basis of the material world. It is therefore possible that the comparison between the *gunas* of *prakṛti* and water in this passage implies a comparison between the role of the *gunas* in the Samkhya-Karika's explanation of cosmogony and the role of the waters in some of the various cosmogonies that we have looked at.

Although *purusa* is left out of the scheme of manifestation, its presence is nevertheless a vital component, for it is only in the presence of *purusa*, the principle of pure consciousness, that *prakṛti* can evolve. *Purusa* is the inactive, indifferent spectator or witness that is completely distinct from anything having to do with *prakṛti*.⁵¹ Because the two

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are always in proximity with one another, an interplay between them occurs that is necessary in order for *prakṛti* to evolve. *Purusa* is the catalyst of *prakṛti*'s evolution. Furthermore, each appears to acquire the characteristics of the other even though they remain completely distinct. ⁵² Each is reflected in the other.

There is little discussion among scholars regarding the gender identity of *prakṛti* in the classical literature. Although *prakṛti* is a feminine noun in Sanskrit, there is no clear assertion in the Samkhya-Karika that *prakṛti* is conceived as an unequivocally feminine principle. However, the function of *prakṛti* as the source of the material world adumbrates a maternal function, and in one place *prakṛti* is compared to a dancing girl (*nartaki*).⁵³ It is also important to note that the two levels of *prakṛti* the primordial or "root" level (*mulaprakṛti*) indicated by designations that include nonfeminine Sanskrit terms (*pradhana*, *avyakta*), and a concrete level indicated more distinctly by the more or less equivalent feminine term (*prakṛti*) are reminiscent of the two levels of the waters that we have seen in the Vedas, the waters as both abstract materiality (*ambhas*, *samudra*, *salila*) and as the feminine source of the manifest world (*ap*). The similarity between these two schemes again indicates that there may be some genuine but incompletely articulated connection between the Vedic waters and the *prakṛti* of Samkhya.

Maya

The significance of the concept of *maya* in Brahmanical literature is in many ways closely related to that of *prakṛti*. We have already noted in the previous chapter the significance of the term *maya* in the Vedic Samhitas with respect to its connection with Viraj. We have also seen that in the Upanisads and the Bhagavad-Gita, *maya* tends to be equated or at least associated with *prakṛti*. Although a detailed study of the significance of the term in the history of Indian

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religion and philosophy is well beyond the scope of this investigation, it will be helpful to explore a bit more deeply some of the various connotations of *maya* and its relationship not only to *prakṛti* but also to *sakti*.

Maya in Vedic and Early Post-Vedic Contexts

Jan Gonda argues that the term *maya* possesses a central meaning that underlies all uses of the term in Vedic and post-Vedic texts and can be defined as "incomprehensible wisdom and power enabling its possessor, or being able itself, to create, devise, contrive, effect, or do something." ⁵⁴ This definition is helpful for understanding the general sense of the term but is perhaps not adequately context-specific. If we look at the earliest uses of the term in the Samhitas, *maya* seems to have several meanings, including (1) ethically neutral power possessed by the gods (*devas*) or demons (*asuras*), (2) a special ability of a god to create or assume different forms, (3) marvelous skill or capacity of achieving the marvelous, (4) divine ability or wisdom, (5) achievement made possible by supranormal or superhuman skill and ability, (6) ability of the gods to interfere in worldly events, and (7) cunning, design, or trickery.⁵⁵ In the Vedas, *maya* is associated particularly with the *asuras*.

Teun Goudriaan draws upon Gonda's definition of *maya*, but he offers a more thorough examination of the various dimensions of *maya* in a variety of different genres of literature, focusing on the nonphilosophical, primarily mythological significance of the term. Goudriaan asserts that the term *maya* in the Vedic Samhitas stands for a neutral force used for the creation of a real, material form, human or nonhuman, and by means of which the creator of that form demonstrates his incomprehensible power.⁵⁶ The god or demon who applies *maya* does so in two ways: (1) by causing

some new form to originate, or (2) by applying his creative power to himself so that he appears in a new and different form, a disguise that is not perceived as such by

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mortals. Thus, *maya* is, among other things, a power or ability associated with both creation and transformation. The term *maya* is used to describe three different aspects of these two processes: (1) it is the power that is used to create a new appearance; (2) it is the creation of that appearance as an abstract performance; and (3) it is the result of the process, the form that is created. There are no clear distinctions made among the power, its manifestation, and the result of the process.⁵⁷ These different meanings of the term in the mythological literature of the Samhitas are then reapplied philosophically in the Upanisads and the Bhagavad-Gita, but the different levels of meaning are not clearly distinguished.

The implication of Goudriaan's observations is important for our understanding of the relationship between *prakṛti* and *maya* in the early texts. If *maya* refers to all three processes the power of creation or transformation, the act of creation or transformation, and the resulting material form then *prakṛti*, which is the principle of materiality, can be seen as one dimension of *maya*, that is, as the material form resulting from either creation by God or God's transformation of himself into either abstract or concrete form. Thus the equation between the two principles in Svetasvatara Upanisad 4. 10 and the seeming equation between them in Bhagavad-Gita 7. 14 make perfect sense. Yet the apparent distinction between them in Bhagavad-Gita 4. 6 ("Having taken control of my own *prakṛti*, I come into being by my own *maya*") also makes sense; in this passage, *prakṛti* probably means the third aspect of *maya*, material form resulting from a process of creation/transformation, whereas the term *maya* is used to denote the power of transformation or the act itself by means of which the created form comes about. The various levels of meaning of the term also provide an important link between *prakṛti* and *śakti*, for they can both be subsumed under the different layers of meaning of the early use of the term *maya*. Goudriaan himself notes that as power *maya* can be compared to or equated

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with *śakti*, whereas as material form it can be identified with *prakṛti*.⁵⁸ *Śakti* and *prakṛti* represent successive stages in the process of manifestation. This interpretation of the relationship between the two notions is quite different from that of Sāṃkhya-Kārika 15 and 16, where *prakṛti* is the ultimate cause of creation and the term *śakti* describes *prakṛti*'s ability to manifest.

The association of *maya* with trickery or delusion of some kind is also present in the Vedic literature. In the Samhitas, the word is often used to denote the wiles of different beings.⁵⁹ This sense of the term *maya* also appears in the Upanisads. In the Prasna Upanisad, one of the older Upanisads, the term *maya* appears once and is associated with crookedness (*jihva*) and falsehood (*anṛta*).

Those who possess austerity (*tapas*) and continence (*brahmacarya*), and in whom the truth is established, they indeed possess that world of Brahman (Brahmaloka). To them belongs the pure world of Brahman, in which there is no crookedness (*jihva*) no falsehood (*anṛta*), and no *maya*.⁶⁰

The passage ascribes a negative connotation to the term *maya* and asserts that only those who are free from it will attain the world of Brahman. The precise meaning of the term in this passage, however, is not clear, although it is associated with wrong knowledge or wrong behavior and leads away from a desirable goal.

Maya in Advaita Vedānta

As *maya* has so many connotations in the Vedas, a clear distinction between the meaning of the terms *prakṛti* and *maya* arises only in later philosophical literature, where the connotations of the word *maya* with illusion or delusion connotations that are present from the earliest occurrences of the term in Vedic literature through the Upanisads, as we have seen rise to the fore. This happens in later centuries

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when clearly defined, rival philosophical schools form. As Samkhya concerns itself with the nature of ultimate reality, which it presents as consisting of two independent and incommensurate principles, there is another school of thought in Brahmanical Hinduism, the school of Advaita Vedanta, that focuses on similar concerns. Advaita Vedanta takes the Upanisads as its starting point and builds upon Upanisadic reflections to arrive at an ontology that is somewhat different from that of Samkhya-Yoga. Although we will not embark upon a detailed discussion of Advaita Vedanta, it is important to understand some of its essential tenets and to note the significance and importance of the term *maya* in this school of philosophy.

According to Samkara, the prime exponent of the school of Advaita Vedanta, there is only one principle that is truly real, not two principles, as we have seen to be the view held by Samkhya. As in the Upanisads, on which all schools of Vedanta are ultimately based, this principle is designated as Brahman or Atman. Basing his arguments on the Upanisads, Samkara proposes that there are two distinct levels of Brahman.

Brahman is understood to have two forms: one is possessed of the conditioning factors that characterize the diverse elements of the world, which represent the modifications of name and form, and the other is free from all conditioning factors and is opposed to the earlier one. 61

On the highest level, Brahman is described as pure being or truth (*sat* or *satya*), pure consciousness (*cit* or *caitanya*), and pure bliss (*ananda*) but is also said to be devoid of all particular qualities or attributes (*nirguna*).⁶² This conception of Brahman is very much out of Upanisadic thought. In the Upanisads, Brahman is said to be beyond comprehension and is described by negation as being "not this, not that" (*neti, neti*). In Advaita Vedanta as well, Brahman is said to be beyond rational comprehension and is described with

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negative language. Samkara quotes passages from the Upanisads to illustrate the nature of Brahman, arguing that Brahman is an infinite impersonal principle that is formless, changeless, indivisible, and without any limitation or qualifier whatsoever:

"It is without parts, without action, tranquil, without imperfection, spotless, the supreme bridge of immortality, like fire that has burned out its fuel" (Svetasvatara Upanisad 6. 19). It is "not this, not that" (Brhadaranyaka Upanisad 2. 3. 6); "It is neither gross nor minute" (Brhadaranyaka Upanisad 3. 8. 8). 63

There is also a second, lower level of Brahman that is said to be possessed of attributes (*saguna*). On this level, Brahman is conceived to be personal and is designated as God (Isvara). Ultimately, however, this aspect of Brahman is not ontologically distinct from the higher, formless level of Brahman, which alone is truly real. Brahman with attributes is Brahman as interpreted by the human mind, which has a limited and hence ignorant perspective.⁶⁴

The world arises from out of Brahman. Samkara tells us that Brahman fashions the world out of a sense of play (*lila*) and with no other motive whatsoever:

Just as in the world the activities of some king or king's minister whose desires are fulfilled become a form of play (*lila*), without any aim and without any motive, in the manner of sports and pastimes, or as exhalation, inhalation, and so forth occur spontaneously, without aim and without any external motive, so also the activity of God (Isvara) is only a form of play (*lila*) arising spontaneously, irrespective of any other motive. Although the fashioning of the sphere of this world appears to us to be a very difficult task, nevertheless for God it is just play, because his power (*sakti*) is unlimited.⁶⁵

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Although this process of fashioning the world takes place, cosmogony in the conventional sense never actually occurs. Since Nirguna Brahman is the only ultimately real principle, the world, like the lower level of Brahman, cannot be said to be truly real, for it has no independent existence apart from Brahman. Although the created world is real from a practical, phenomenal perspective, existing independent of our thoughts and thus present to us in name and form, it is ultimately unreal from a metaphysical perspective. The illusion of the true reality of the world is superimposed, as the image of a

snake may be superimposed on a piece of rope, or as a single moon may appear as double. 66 In fact, the universe is ultimately not in any way distinct from Brahman.

Just as the spaces within pots, water jars, and so forth are not different from cosmic space, or just as water in a mirage, and so forth is not different from salty soil, and so forth, because they appear and then disappear by nature and are not clearly discernible, in this way it is to be seen that this diverse world of enjoyers, things enjoyed, and so forth has no existence apart from

Brahman.67 That by means of which the appearance of the world is brought about is termed *maya*, which is a kind of creative potency or *sakti* inherent within Brahman. For Samkara, *maya* is applied on two levels. First, *maya* is the power by means of which Nirguna Brahman becomes Saguna Brahman or Isvara. In this regard, it is said that Brahman takes on form by means of his *maya* for the sake of his worshipers, that is, so that Brahman may become accessible to them.68 Second, *maya* is also the power through which Isvara then brings into being the phenomenal-empirical realm. In other words, it is the power by means of which the delusory sphere of relative, conditioned reality is projected from out of Brahman.69 Thus *maya* is both creative,

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in the sense that it brings into being the relative world, and delusive, in the sense that what *maya* creates is essentially a kind of delusion. The relative world, which is the product of *maya*, is unreal, and the belief in its reality is a product of ignorance. Even the existence of the lower level of Brahman, his *saguna* form as Isvara, is not truly real. Thus, *maya* also impedes a true understanding of Brahman.

Because of its role as the concealer of the true nature of reality, *maya* is also called ignorance, *avidya*, and is opposed to knowledge, *vidya*. Whereas *avidya* represents ignorance of the true nature of Brahman and leads to entrapment in the continual round of birth and rebirth, *vidya* represents the spiritual realization of Nirguna Brahman and leads to liberation. *Avidya* appears to be the epistemological equivalent of the term *maya*, which applies more to the level of ontology. The precise relationship between these two terms in Samkara's work, however, is not clear. 70

In his discussion of *maya*, Samkara often argues against the basic tenets of Samkhya and claims that what may appear in the Upanisads as evidence that would support Samkhya's description of *prakrti* actually has to do with *maya*. He takes the term *avyakta*, for example, to refer primarily to *maya*, not *prakrti*. His discussion of the Svetasvatara Upanisad's equation of *prakrti* and *maya* is quite interesting in this regard:

That seed-power (*bijasakti*, = Brahman's ability to create) consists of ignorance (*avidya*); it is denoted by the word "unmanifest" (*avyakta*), has the highest Lord as its substratum, (and) is of the nature of *maya*. . . . Sometimes it is called *maya* (as in) "Know thus that *prakrti* is *maya*; the Great Lord (Mahesvara) then is the possessor of *maya* (*mayin*)" (Svetasvatara Upanisad 4. 10). That *maya* is surely the unmanifest (*avyakta*), for it cannot be defined either as real or as not real.71

Samkara understands the passage as giving priority to *maya*, and he imbeds this discussion of *maya* in the context of a

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long refutation of the position that the term *avyakta* denotes the *pradhana/prakrti* of Samkhya. 72 Since for Samkara the Upanisads articulate the nature of *maya* as the unmanifest source of the universe, *maya* takes pride of place over *prakrti*. Samkara again addresses the relationship between *prakrti/pradhana* and *maya* in his discussion of Svetasvatara Upanisad 4. 5, the above-discussed passage that refers to the unborn female (*aja*) who is red, white, and black.73 Samkara, however, interprets *aja* as denoting *maya* and asserts that the three colors refer not to the *gunas* but to the three elements fire, water, and earth, the last of which he understands to be meant by the term "food" (*anna*).74 Furthermore, he argues that in this passage, the term *aja* does not mean "unborn female" but "she-goat, " and that what is meant by this passage is a metaphor.

Just as in the world, there may by chance be some she-goat (*aja*) that is red, white, and black in color with many kids that are of the same form, and some he-goat might lie with her taking his pleasure while some other might

leave her after enjoying her, similarly this source of all beings [= *maya*] consisting of fire, water, and food/earth (*anna*) and having three colors generates many animate and inanimate products that have the same form as her, is enjoyed by the ignorant knower of the body (*ksetrajñā*), and is abandoned by the wise.⁷⁵

In such ways, Samkara attempts to undermine the claims of Samkhya and its doctrine of *prakṛti* by appealing to the authority of the Upanisads.

If we compare the assertions of Advaita Vedanta and those of Samkhya, it is clear that there are some important similarities as well as essential differences. Nirguna Brahman is very much like the *purusa* of Samkhya philosophy. Both are defined as pure consciousness and transcend the kinds of qualifications that are applied to the phenomenal world. It is important to note, however, that despite their similarities, there is at least one important difference be-

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tween Brahman and *purusa*, namely, that there is only one Brahman but many *purusas*. Similarly, *maya* is, like *prakṛti*, the basis for the manifestation of the phenomenal material world. Yet there is also an important distinction between *maya* and *prakṛti*: *maya* ultimately cannot be said to be real. For Samkara, *maya* is neither real, nor unreal, nor both real and unreal, nor neither real nor unreal. *Maya* is indescribable (*anirvacaniya*). But if we must describe it in some way, we can say that, unlike *prakṛti*, *maya* has no true existence but is a kind of illusion or delusion that is projected forth. In Advaita Vedanta, everything is ultimately based on a single, uniquely real principle, Brahman. Samkhya, on the other hand, is essentially dualist, for *prakṛti* and *purusa* are both fully real and at the same time completely distinct.

In the history of the texts of Vedanta, the clear delineation of *maya* as a kind of illusion or delusion appears quite late. We have already seen that its meaning in the Upanisads is equivocal. In the fundamental text of the school of Vedanta, the Brahma- or Vedanta-Sutras, which date from about the second century B. C. E. ,⁷⁶ the term *maya* appears only once and is associated with the incomplete manifestation of the attributes of waking reality in the dream state.⁷⁷ The connection of the term with the notion of illusion in later Advaita Vedanta literature, most especially the works of Samkara approximately one thousand years later, shows clearly the influence of Sunyavada Buddhism, the texts of which date from the first centuries of the Common Era and expound a similar doctrine of *maya*.⁷⁸ It is notable also that the mother of the Buddha in early Buddhist accounts of the life of Gautama the Buddha is called Mahamaya ("great *maya*"), indicating a connection in this literature of the term *maya* with maternal femininity. As we shall see, the terms *maya* and *mahamaya* become important in the Puranas, where they are often used to designate the supreme goddess equated with certain cosmogonic principles.

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It is not at all clear whether or not the comprehension of *maya* as predominantly a principle of delusion is very important in the passages of the Upanisads and Gita cited above, where *maya* is associated with *prakṛti*. It is quite possible that the sense of the term as indicating something illusory is *not* its primary force in such contexts, and that it is used more in the sense of the capacity for God to create, the act of creating, and the creation that results. Thus, in Bhagavad-Gita 4. 6 cited above, "taking control of my own *prakṛti*, I come into being by my own *maya*," the sense of the term *maya* may be more that of a kind of neutral ability or power of manifestation possessed by God than a power of illusion. Thus *maya* is in one sense *prakṛti*, but it is also *sakti*, a concept to which we will now turn.

Sakti

An exploration of the origins and development of the concept of a cosmological principle of power or *sakti* is rather complex for three primary reasons. First, the concept itself incorporates several distinct elements. Second, the lines of development are not very clear. And finally, the systematic articulation of *sakti* as an important cosmogonic and cosmological notion emerges quite late and does so primarily outside of the mainstream Vedic-Brahmanical tradition, namely, in the scriptures of the Tantric and Sakta traditions. This corpus is not only expansive, but also quite diverse, and thus it frustrates attempts to locate unifying principles.

Despite such difficulties, however, it is possible to sketch a broad outline of the lines of development of the *sakti* idea. In

doing so, we will focus particular attention on three primary areas: (1) the idea of a female figure as a consort and/or aspect of a male divinity described particularly as manifesting his ability to create; (2) the development of the idea of a cosmogonic power that is possessed by a single, supreme god (Deva/Isvara) and embodies his ability to

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create the world but is not necessarily identified as female, and (3) the notion of an abstract, all-pervasive power inherent within creation. Speech (*vac*) and the role that speech plays in creation help connect all of these different notions. We will then explore how these different ideas are brought together to give rise to the notion of a supreme female divinity who represents the *sakti* of her divine male consort and embodies his ability to create the manifest world.

As it is not possible to highlight every occurrence of the term *sakti* in the history of Indian literature, we will instead focus on paradigmatic interpretive fields of the term, that is, the different genres of conceptualization of the term.

Vedic Roots

Although the term *sakti* appears in Vedic literature, it does not have any great theological, cosmological, or metaphysical significance in this context. In the Rg-Veda, there appear to be two distinct meanings of the term: *sakti* denotes either "ability, power, capacity, " or "help, service. " The use of the term to designate different kinds of ability is also found throughout the Vedic Samhitas and Brahmanas. 79

More interesting for our discussion are the Vedic mythological structures that seem to represent the foundation from which later conceptions regarding the notion of *sakti* emerge. As discussed in chapter one, the association between certain Vedic goddesses and a principle of energy can be found in seed form in the Vedic literature. The first clear articulation of the cosmogonic result of sexual union of a god with his female consort appears in the Brahmanas. Of primary importance in this regard are the goddesses Indrani/Saci and Vac. Both divinities are associated with a male consort figure with whom they unite, leading to creation of the manifest world.⁸⁰ Furthermore, both are conceived to represent a creative capacity or ability of the god

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with whom they are associated Indrani as Indra's "might" or saci and Vac as Prajapati's creative speech. Thus we find in the Brahmanas an understanding of the union of a god with his consort as the initial impulse that sets the stage for the emanation and manifestation of the cosmos.

Discussion of this kind of mythological cosmogonic union seems to be absent from the Upanisads. However, its influence can be discerned in the Svetasvatara Upanisad, where a similar concept is described in the more speculative language characteristic of Upanisadic inquiry. Thus in Svetasvatara Upanisad 4. 1, there is one supreme god who is described as bringing about the manifestation of the diverse world by applying his power or *sakti*:

He (who is) one, without color (*avarna*), places many colors in his hidden purpose by means of the manifold application of his power (*sakti*); and into whom, in the beginning and at the end, this all is gathered, he (who is) divine/God (*deva*) may he endow us with a clear intellect (*buddhi*).

In this passage, the means by which this single, supreme divinity creates is the application of his capacity or *sakti* in manifold ways. ⁸¹ This description of God creating by means of the application of his *sakti* parallels the descriptions in the Brahmanas where Prajapati creates through union with Vac.⁸² We should also add the coupling of Indra/Indrani to that of Prajapati/Vac as the mythological precursors of this Upanisad's more abstract description. The term *sakti* is used elsewhere in this Upanisad as well to denote God's power and is described as belonging to him. Thus we find in 1. 3:

Those who followed after meditation and yoga saw the self-power of God (*devatmasakti*) hidden by his own qualities (*svaguna*). He who is one rules over all these causes connected to time and the Self.

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The self-power of God (*devatmasakti*) mentioned in Svetasvatara Upanisad 1. 3 is not further elaborated. The text then continues by describing the relationship between God and creation:

(We understand) him (to be a wheel) with one felly, threefold, having sixteen ends, fifty spokes, twenty counterspokes and six sets of eights, whose one rope is manifold, which has three different paths, whose one delusion (*moha*) (arises) from two causes.

We understand him to be a river of five streams, having five sources, mighty and crooked, whose waves are the five vital breaths, whose original source is fivefold perception, having five whirlpools, an impetuous flood of five forms of suffering divided into fifty kinds (and) having five branches.

In this vast wheel of Brahman that enlivens all things (and) stands in all things, the soul (*hamsa*) flutters about thinking that the self and the inciter (*preritr*) are different. Then, when favored by him, he (the soul) attains immortality. 83

What are these different portions of God? Both Robert E. Hume and S. Radhakrishnan take these different elements to refer to the various categories enumerated in Samkhya. Thus, the threefold form may refer to the three *gunas* of *prakrti*; the sixteen ends may be the five gross elements, the five sense capacities, the five action capacities, and the mind; and so forth.⁸⁴ The relationship between the *sakti* of God and the material world with which he is identified is not clear. It is possible, however, that the qualities or *gunas* mentioned earlier in 1. 3 may refer to the three *gunas* of *prakrti* implied in 1. 4 by the phrase "threefold" (*trivrtam*). Therefore, God's self-power or *sakti* mentioned in 1. 3 could refer to the ability of the *gunas* to unfold. This interpretation would understand the significance of the term *sakti* in this passage in a way that would be consonant with its

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meaning in Samkhya-Karika 15 and 16, where the term *sakti* designates the ability of *prakrti* to manifest. 85

The other principal Upanisads do not mention *sakti* at all. Thus it seems that the sole Upanisadic articulation of the term understands it to refer not to any kind of general ability or power but specifically to the power of the one supreme God himself. This represents a transformation from the use of the term in the earlier Vedic texts and indicates a new emphasis on the use of the term *sakti* specifically to denote divine power.⁸⁶

It appears, then, that there are two main contributions of the Vedic literature with respect to later construction of a metaphysics of the term *sakti*: (1) the coupling of a male god (Indra, Prajapati) with a female divinity (Indrani/Saci, Vac) who is construed as representing some creative or cosmogonic capacity of that god; and (2) the notion found in the Svetasvatara Upanisad of a single, absolute divinity possessed of a unique power described as his *sakti*.

Sakti in Philosophical Literature

As in the Vedas, the term *sakti* in the early Indian philosophical literature does not seem to have any great cosmological or metaphysical significance. There is nonetheless a line of speculation that can be traced from Vaisesika through Mimamsa that develops a notion of an unseen potency (*adrsta*, *apurva*) that by about the sixth or seventh century comes to be identified in Mimamsaka literature with the term *sakti*.⁸⁷

The Vaisesika-Sutras of Kanada, the foundational sutras of the school of Vaisesika philosophy, probably date no later than the first century of the Common Era.⁸⁸ Although the first sutra asserts that the object of inquiry is the nature of *dharma* (law, order, or duty), the text is more generally preoccupied with questions concerning the nature of the material world. The chief feature of the Vaisesika-Sutras is the description and analysis of the different categories

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(*padartha*) of material reality, namely, substance (*dravya*), quality (*guna*), action (*karma*), class (*samanya*), particularity (*visesa*), and inherence (*samavaya*), knowledge of which is said to produce the supreme good and the understanding of

which is said to be conducive to *dharma*. 89

The fifth book of the Vaisesika-Sutras discusses among other things the nature of an unseen power, called the *adrsta*, which brings about the consequences of actions and is responsible for all inexplicable phenomena. The circulation of water in trees, for example, is said to be caused by the *adrsta*, as are a variety of other processes and effects.⁹⁰ It appears that this unseen force is the cause and support of all forms of life including human life, for without it, according to one passage, there can be no conjunction of the soul with the body, hence no birth or rebirth.⁹¹ This *adrsta* on which life processes depend is generated and supported by human action. The performance of deeds condoned in the Veda by dharmic injunction, such as ablutions, fasts, or sacrifices, results in unseen (*adrsta*) and desirable fruits.⁹² One sutra states that the performance of such actions, both those that can be seen to be good or useful and those that are less obviously so but are nonetheless prescribed in the Vedas, is favorable because it produces *adrsta*.⁹³ Thus the very support of the known world, the *adrsta*, is the unseen force that is generated by the performance of Vedic injunctions.

It appears clear, then, that in the Vaisesika-Sutras this *adrsta* is a force inherent within the material world. But to what extent is it a cosmogonic force? Sutra 5. 2. 13 states that the initial (*adya*) movement of fire, air, atoms, and the mind is caused by the *adrsta*. In his commentary, the *Upaskara*, Samkara Misra (fifteenth century) interprets the term *adya* to refer to the beginning of creation. It is in fact the case that beginning in approximately the sixth century, Nyaya-Vaisesika philosophers did postulate the *adrsta* as a clearly cosmogonic power that impels creation into existence and is responsible for its dissolution.⁹⁴ Whether or

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not this is the force of the term in the Vaisesika-Sutras, however, is difficult to determine.

The school of Purva-Mimamsa, which is particularly concerned with the upholding of *dharma* and Vedic injunctions, postulates a force similar to the *adrsta* called *apurva*, which is a subtle, invisible power that produces beneficent results from the performance of the Vedic sacrifice. Kumarila Bhatta (sixth or seventh century), one of the main exponents of Purva-Mimamsa, explicitly describes the *apurva* as a kind of *sakti*. He argues that the *apurva* is only a particular kind of *sakti* inherent in either the means or the ends of the sacrificial act itself.

The *apurva* is only the *sakti*, either of the process the sacrifice and so forth aiming for a result, or of the [desired] result itself, cattle and so forth. It is not different from this. 95

Kumarila also expounds a more general understanding of *sakti* as the power inherent in all objects that determines the relationship between an individual cause and its particular, appropriate effect. Why, he asks in his polemic against the Buddhists, should it be the case that a conjunction of threads produces cloth and not a jar? He argues that there must be some inherent power or *sakti* that determines what effect will come from what cause.⁹⁶ Furthermore, Kumarila subsumes linguistic categories that are developed by the grammarians and that, as we shall see, emphasize the role of *sakti* in connection with the semantic capability of words. Kumarila adheres to the position that each word has a fixed power of denotation, a *sakti*, that links it to its meaning or meanings.⁹⁷ Prabhakara (sixth or seventh century), another Mimamsaka and a rival to Kumarila, appears to share the latter's understanding of *sakti* as embodying the power inherent in the relationship between any cause and its effect but goes even further, proposing the existence of *sakti* as an independent category of material reality (*padartha*).⁹⁸

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Thus we find that in these lines of speculation there is the notion of some unseen potency *adrsta*, *apurva*, or *sakti* which inheres in the natural (and also verbal) world as well as the sacrificial order and provides a link between cause and effect on a variety of levels. It is important to note, however, that Mimamsa has no doctrine of creation. Thus in the Mimamsa texts, reflections regarding this unseen potency are never applied to cosmogony; the link between cause and effect is described only in terms of the manifest world, not in terms of the mechanisms of creation and manifestation of the universe.

The term *sakti* appears in an important passage in the Yoga-Sutras, but in this context *sakti* does not relate to either cosmogony or cosmology but rather to that which transcends both. The term *sakti* is used to describe the power of

consciousness (*citisakti*) that is beyond the *gunas*:

Isolation (*kaivalya*) or the power of consciousness (*citisakti*) standing in itself arises when the *gunas* return to their original state, devoid of the objects of consciousness (*purusartha*). 99

In other words, *citisakti* is *purusa*, pure consciousness. In this context, *sakti* has nothing at all to do with the creation but rather represents the ability of consciousness to stand apart from the evolution of the *gunas*. Finally, the term *sakti* is also found in the Brahma-Sutras, where it is mentioned at least twice, in 2. 2. 9 and 2. 3. 38. In the former instance, it is stated that the *pradhana* (*prakrti*) of Samkhya cannot be the principle of causation because it has no power of intelligence (*jñāakti*). In 2. 3. 38, it is said (according to Samkara's interpretation of this sutra) that intellect (*buddhi*) cannot be an active agent because if it were, there would be a reversal of *sakti* (*saktiviparyaya*). Neither passage seems to understand the term as referring specifically to cosmological or cosmogonic phenomena. It is true that Samkara, probably drawing on the similarity between the use of the term *maya* in Upanisadic thought and in the Bhagavad-Gita and the con-

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ception of *sakti* in not only the Svetasvatara Upanisad but also the Tantric and Sakta thought of the period in which he lived, elevates the concept by describing *maya* as the divine, creative power (*sakti*) of the Absolute Brahman; his understanding, however, appears rather late. 100

The notion of *sakti* as a general force inherent in creation begins to develop in the philosophical materials of the classical period. It is important to note, however, that in these philosophical systems, this force is never construed in mythological or gender-specific terms and is never interpreted theistically.

Sakti in Grammatical Literature

Along with the Vedic and philosophical traditions, there is yet another stream of reflection that contributed to the rise of the notion of *sakti*, namely, the grammatical tradition. This line of thought develops and elaborates the Brahmanas' notion of speech (*vac*) as a supreme creative principle and combines it with the notion of a cosmogonic and cosmological energy (*sakti*) of God that impels creation into manifestation, resulting in a new synthesis of these two strands of speculation.

In the grammatical tradition, the term *sakti* can be used to refer to the "power" of a case or the relation that is conveyed by a case and thus signifies the semantic significance of the inflection of words in any given phrase or sentence. The *sakti* of a word determines its ability to convey meaning in the context in which it is found. The term *sakti* is also used to refer to the capacity of a word generally to possess and convey signification. Thus *sakti* is that which determines the ability of a word to have meaning. 101

The elevation of the notion of *sakti* in a context of language theory is most remarkable in the work of Bhartrhari (ca. fifth century), one of the most famous of the grammatical theoreticians. In his *Vakyapadiya*, Bhartrhari carries his speculations far beyond the confines of

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concrete expressions of language and attempts to understand and interpret language on a metalevel. For Bhartrhari, the Absolute, Brahman, is conceived of as a principle of language and is called Sabdatattva or Sabdabrahman. Sabdabrahman is not only ultimate reality; it is also both the efficient and the material cause of the universe. Creation is described as a kind of manifestation or emanation of the world from the Ultimate:

The imperishable Brahman, having no beginning nor end, whose essence is the Word (*sabda*), evolves/comes forth (*vi vrt*) by appearing in objects, from which (then) arises the production of the world. 102

Although Sabdabrahman is a monistic principle, it possesses various powers or *saktis*. These are its attributes and are not ontologically distinct from it.

It [Sabdabrahman] is described as singular, but it becomes divided into parts on the basis of (its) *saktis*, from

which it is not different. Although it is not different from the *saktis*, it appears different.103

Sabdabrahman is beyond creation but becomes capable of creation through the activation of its various *saktis*. The most important of these is the power of time or *kalasakti*, for it is this *sakti* that is responsible for creation:

Relying on the *kalasakti*, (the other *saktis*) are the sources of the six transformations, birth and so forth.104

At the beginning of creation, Sabdabrahman appears as different forms that are manifest in an order determined by the *kalasakti*. The process of world-evolution set in motion by the *kalasakti* of Sabdabrahman takes place along two lines: evolution of form or speech and matter or meaning. At the level of the Absolute, these two are identical. The difference between name and meaning that we experience on the phenomenal-empirical plane is not present at the

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highest level but is a distinction that becomes discernible only when the cosmic process begins. 105

To describe the relation between the Absolute level of reality and the relative world, Bhartrhari posits an unfolding of Sabdabrahman in terms of three main levels that represent successive stages of differentiation between name and meaning. These are articulated quite simply in a single verse of the text.

(The tradition of grammar) is the supreme and wonderful abode of *vaikhari*, *madhyama*, and *pasyanti*, the threefold word (*vac*) that has many channels through which it unfolds.106

Pasyanti, *madhyama*, and *vaikhari* represent increasingly differentiated levels of word or speech (*vac*). *Pasyanti* is the purest aspect of *vac* and is identical with Sabdabrahman. At this level, there is inherent within the word the power (*sakti*) to unfold in succession, but this power is held in restraint. The expressive potential of *pasyanti* is then fully realized in the level of speech called *vaikhari vac*, which is the level of ordinary speech. Between these two is a middle level, *madhyama vac*, which is the subtle level of speech perceived internally by the mind.107 Considering the passages cited above, it would appear that the *pasyanti* level of word or speech assumes the more differentiated levels of *madhyama* and *vaikhari* through the agency of the *kalasakti*.108

In the *Vakyapadiya*, the understanding of speech as a creative force is joined with the notion of *sakti* as a cosmogonic power of the Absolute. Creation comes about through the successive unfolding of increasingly differentiated levels of speech, an unfolding that is prompted by the supreme power or *sakti* of the Absolute here conceived in terms of speech and described as Sabdabrahman. Thus the Brahmana tradition of portraying speech, *vac*, as a cosmogonic force is fully developed in the *Vakyapadiya* and explicitly connected with the notion of a divine, cosmogonic *sakti* that

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is an inherent aspect of the Absolute. Whereas *vac* is often described as a goddess in the Brahmana literature, however, this is not the case in Bhartrhari's philosophy of language.

Sakti in Tantric Literature

The different strands of thought described above that pertain to the understanding and use of the term *sakti* in diverse textual environments represent different yet related notions. In Tantra, these diverse conceptual threads are then woven together along with others. It is in Tantric treatises arising outside the Vedic-Brahmanical tradition that the most fully and systematically articulated conception of *sakti* as a cosmogonic and cosmological capacity identified as an omnipresent and omnipotent goddess develops. It is beyond the scope of this study to present an elaborate description of Tantric texts or doctrines. There are in fact many excellent studies already available that address such issues in detail, and there is currently a marked increase in scholarly output in this area. 109 Rather, we will give a brief summary of the essential elements of Tantric thought that are directly relevant to the present investigation and represent the most distinctive features of the Tantric understanding of *sakti*. As the portrayal of *sakti* in Tantrism has a great deal in common with the portrayal also found in Puranic literature, this issue will be addressed in greater length in the next chapter.

The chronology and history of early Tantric literature are obscure. Scholars not only argue about dates, but they even

disagree on what exactly the terms "Tantra, " "Tantrism, " "Tantric literature, " and so forth designate. It is difficult to distinguish clearly between Tantric elements and Tantrism as a fully developed ritual and doctrinal system. Furthermore, there are certainly many Tantric elements that existed prior to the first appearances of such elements in texts.¹¹⁰ Although texts identifying themselves as "Tantras" began to appear only in approximately the ninth century, the seeds

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of the "Tantric tradition" were clearly sown prior to this period. Thus the boundaries of the tradition are unclear. To add to the confusion, Tantric elements appear not only in the Hindu tradition, but also in Buddhist and Jain environments as well. In order to circumvent terminological traps, then, it is perhaps best to speak of a kind of orientation or tendency that can, for the sake of convenience, be termed "Tantric" and to limit our discussion to texts that are Hindu in emphasis.

In Tantra, some of the various strands that we have seen to be present in the mainstream Vedic-Brahmanical tradition are woven together with others that probably sprang originally from various non-Vedic, popular traditions. The former elements include, among others, the tendency found in the Brahmanas and Upanisads to correlate different levels of reality, namely, the cosmic, natural, human, and sacrificial orders.¹¹¹ Cosmic processes are not only macrocosmic but reverberate on the microcosmic plane and are reproduced on all levels down to the structure of human physiology. Speculation regarding the term *sakti* and the notion of speech as a cosmogonic and cosmological principle is thus subsumed and absorbed into Tantric categories in terms of both micro- and macrocosmic structures. We will focus on reflections regarding the macrocosm.

One of the most distinguishing features of Tantrism and its main contribution to our discussion is the elevation of non-Vedic goddesses to supreme status in Tantric mythology. The tendency to revere specific female divinities as supreme, especially when the goddesses in question are non-Vedic in origin and endowed with qualities that stress their powerful nature, is most likely primarily an autochthonous tendency. In the history of Tantrism, it appears that a preoccupation with the divine power of the Absolute coupled with an emphasis on female symbolism led to written expression of already existing traditions of worship of various goddesses and an elevation of them such that, depending on the individual tradition, various different goddesses be-

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came identified as unique, all-powerful mother goddesses.¹¹² This applies to Sakta tendencies as well, which, although not equivalent to Tantrism, also elevate the stature of specific goddesses and form with Tantrism "two intersecting but not coinciding circles."¹¹³

What is most important to us about the Tantric orientation is the way in which it interprets cosmogony and cosmology. Many forms of Tantra propose the existence of a divine power or *sakti* that is described as supreme in both cosmogonic and cosmological contexts and is clearly identified as feminine. Such an orientation can be discerned in all kinds of literature including, as we shall see, the Puranas but is most clearly elaborated in the Tantra, Agama, and Samhita scriptures of the sectarian Sakta, Saiva, and Vaisnava schools.

In Tantra generally the Absolute, although singular in essence at the highest level, is understood to be essentially polarized into female and male aspects. The female pole is that of energy, *sakti*. The male aspect of God cannot act alone but only through his energy, his *sakti*, with whom he is inseparably united and who is hypostatized as a goddess. Thus the supreme Sakti, without whom God would be incapable of action, is that aspect of the Godhead that is ultimately responsible for the creation or manifestation of the cosmos. She is especially identified as the fountainhead from which spring other female forms that unite on all levels with complementary male forms. The created world ultimately arises through such coupling.¹¹⁴ In Saiva and some Sakta traditions, Siva is identified as the supreme god, and the goddess associated with him-Parvati, Durga, and so forth is Saiva and is subordinate to him. This is not always the case, however. In Vaisnava Tantrism, the supreme is conceived to be Visnu or one of his incarnations and the goddess associated with him is Vaisnava (Laksmi, for example). In Sakta Tantrism, the goddess who is identified as Sakti is usually elevated above the male aspect of the Godhead. The distinction between male and female that

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occurs in manifest creation is ultimately rooted in gender polarities inherent within the Absolute.

In some Tantric schools, the understanding of a supreme feminine principle who is *sakti* is coupled with reflections regarding the nature of speech, *vac*, often discussed in terms of Sabdabrahman, and the unfolding of creation in cosmogony is embodied in and expressed as the unfolding of language. As we have seen above, a tendency to elevate speech to the status of a goddess is already present in the Vedas. In the Brahmanas, Vac as a goddess and/or a faculty of speech is the instrumental agent through which Prajapati, the creator, creates. A similar structure is described in the Upanisads, where God creates by applying his power or *sakti*. Much later, Bhartrhari understands speech to be a cosmic phenomenon that penetrates the different levels of creation but is ultimately unified through the *kalasakti*, the power through which speech unfolds. In Tantric materials, these tendencies are united with the impulse to conceive of the *sakti* of God as a female divinity, who then sometimes comes to be identified with Sabdabrahman or with the goddess Vac as the creative, female energy of God that when activated gives rise to the cosmos. In this regard, some Tantric schemes add a fourth, higher level of speech above *pasyanti*, often called *para vac* but sometimes identified in other ways as well. Such representations of a cosmic *sakti* identified with a cosmic principle of speech are found in various different schools of Tantra.

In Pañcaratra, for example, a Tantric Vaisnava school, we find such a homologization of the female consort of Brahman, who in this system is identified as Visnu-Narayana, with Sabdabrahman. According to the Laksmi Tantra, one of the central treatises of Pañcaratra, the goddess Sri or Laksmi is Narayana's consort and his inherent *sakti*, who dwells eternally with him:

Visnu-Narayana is flawless, not governed (by anyone), blameless, eternal, the possessor of Sri, and the eternal

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supreme Self (Paramatman). . . . (He is) ever existent, the highest, and the supreme syllable "OM. " I [Sri or Laksmi] am his most excellent, eternal *sakti*, and I possess his attributes. 115

It is said that as Visnu-Narayana's *sakti* Laksmi has two main aspects, namely, *bhutisakti*, "being-power" or material creation, and *kriyasakti*, "doing-power" or Visnu-Narayana's creative ability. *Kriyasakti* is also named consciousness (*cit*),¹¹⁶ and the nature of Laksmi as consciousness is stressed throughout the text. As Brahman, Visnu-Narayana is essentially changeless and perfectly tranquil, but his *sakti* is not, and it is she who is the immediate, active cause of creation.

The materials that we find in the Laksmi Tantra concerning cosmogony are quite variegated and complex. According to one perspective, however, Laksmi is described as possessing a creative urge (*sisrksa*).¹¹⁷ When this urge is activated, she comes forth and is manifest as Sabdabrahman:

I, Sri, am his [Visnu-Narayana's] supreme *sakti*, not different from him, the support and *sakti* of all, omniscient and facing in all directions. Through me the universe becomes visible, as a mountain (is visible) inside a mirror. My inherent nature (*svarupa*) is characterized by pure, blissful awareness (*bodha*). . . . Evolving that portion of myself that represents awareness (*bodha*), becoming Sabdabrahman, I evolve through the course of my portions (*kala*).¹¹⁸

Creation is then described in terms of the evolution of speech as it is described in Bhartrhari's system. When the urge to create is stirred, this creative *sakti*, which at this point resides in a peaceful (*santa*) state as Sabdabrahman, begins to evolve forth. This evolution is expressed in terms of successive changes of form from *santa* first to *pasyanti*, then *madhyama*, and finally *vaikhari*. This sequence is described both in terms of cosmogonic evolution and in terms of the manifestation of speech, and these four successive

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evolutions are said to constitute the four forms of the goddess herself. 119

A similar conceptualization of creation is found in the texts of nondualistic Kashmir Saivism. In this system, Brahman is identified as Siva and is said to be united eternally with his feminine side, which is his *sakti*. This primal *sakti* is equated with *vac*, speech, and is conceived to be a goddess. At the highest level, she is called *para vac* and is identified with supreme consciousness (*para samvid*). She is Siva's creative energy and the immediate source of creation.

This universe . . . abides without difference in one, supreme, divine, Bhairava-consciousness (*bhairavasamvid*) in the form of awareness (*bodha*). . . . The entire manifestation lies clearly there at rest. All this (universe) . . . resides in that consciousness itself in its own form, which is predominantly *sakti* characterized by the particular creative pulsation (*spanda*) of Bhairava.¹²⁰

As the mechanisms of creation unfold, the supreme *sakti*, who is consciousness, expands and becomes manifest on different levels, bringing about and penetrating the creation of which she is the ultimate source. This expansion is described in terms of the evolution of *sakti* as *para vac* from a supreme state to lower states in successive stages, from *para*, first to *pasyanti*, then to *madhyama*, and finally to *vaikhari*.¹²¹ In this system, too, as in Pañcaratra, this sequence is understood both in terms of the unfolding of the cosmos and in terms of the manifestation of speech.¹²²

Thus the various lines of reflection present in the different textual genres that we have looked at meet in the Tantric materials, which weave together different threads of thought found in diverse environments.

As we have seen, the association with female divinity of a principle of materiality and a principle of energy or power that are cosmological and/or cosmogonic in nature is present from the earliest layer of the Vedic texts. In the

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Vedas, materiality and power are not clearly distinguished. Thus we find that goddesses like Vac or Viraj tend to embody both principles. In the post-Vedic period up to the end of the classical period (ca. sixth century), various schools of thought appear in which elaborate and detailed reflections regarding each of these principles arise. The understanding of an ultimate principle of materiality is most elaborately defined within the confines of Samkhya philosophy, culminating in the system enumerated in the Samkhya-Karika. In these lines of thought, materiality is called *prakṛti* (or, sometimes, *pradhana*, *avyakta*, and so forth) and, in the normative formulation, is not clearly described as female, although the function that it serves as the source of the manifest world may be seen as female in character and parallels the role played in other scriptures by divinities or elements that are explicitly described as female (water and earth, for example).

During the same period and beyond, a separate line of thought develops in which an abstract principle of cosmogonic and cosmological power or energy is described. This stream of thought is fed by two sources: (1) the old Vedic notion of a female figure as a consort and/or aspect of a male divinity, particularly described as his ability to create; and (2) Upanisadic and philosophical assertions regarding either an abstract cosmological force or a cosmogonic power possessed by God and embodying God's ability to create the world. This principle of power or energy is usually called *sakti* and is described in various ways. The notion of a supreme *sakti* that is clearly feminine and is described as a goddess is articulated most explicitly in the literature of various Tantric schools, which begin to emerge in approximately the ninth century. In addition, a third principle called *maya*, which is related to both *prakṛti* and *sakti*, is also developed in various environments during the classical period.

In the Puranas, these strands all come together, and *prakṛti*, *sakti*, and *maya* come to be seen as related aspects of

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creation. In many Puranas, they are explicitly identified with a supreme goddess who is the female pole of the Godhead, Brahman, and the consort of the supreme male God. In Puranas or Puranic passages where the Great Goddess herself is identified as Brahman, the same pattern persists. It is to the exploration of this phenomenon that we will now turn.

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Chapter Three
The Feminine Principle in Puranic Cosmogony and Cosmology

Introduction to the Goddess Materials in the Epics and Puranas

There is yet another important genre of Brahmanical literature that arises in the post-Vedic period. This genre represents a new narrative tendency that diverges from the tradition of Vedic narrative and includes the two great epics (*itihasas*) of India, the Mahabharata and the Ramayana, and the vast mythological compilations called Puranas. The epic and Puranic texts incorporate some of the older Vedic mythological material but recast it by combining it with philosophical materials, as we have seen to be the case in the Mahabharata, and non-Vedic mythological elements. In these texts, there is also increasing importance placed on devotion (*bhakti*) to a supreme divinity as a proper human endeavor. As devotion begins to take center stage, there is a corresponding increase in concern with delineating the natures and actions of different deities.

The influence on the Brahmanical tradition of popular devotional cults centering on different autochthonous Indian goddesses becomes increasingly evident in this literature. From approximately the beginning of the Common

Era on, non-Vedic goddesses are incorporated into the mainstream tradition and thus begin to be recognized as legitimate members of the "orthodox" Brahmanical pantheon. In the Mahabharata, for example, the non-Vedic goddess Durga appears frequently in the text and is associated with both Siva and Krsna. Whereas the tendency to elevate goddesses to high status seems to be part of the indigenous impulse of India, this impulse begins to find expression in the Brahmanical literature at a fairly early date.

One of the ways in which the autochthonous Indian goddesses are incorporated into the epic and Puranic tradition is through the identification of these different goddesses with those of the established Vedic pantheon. In the Mahabharata, for example, Uma is equated with the Vedic goddess Sarasvati; in the Harivama, which is a supplement to the Mahabharata, Durga is equated with both Sarasvati and Savitri. 1 The identification of non-Vedic elements with those that are Vedic is seen throughout the post-Vedic narrative texts and functions as a legitimizing mechanism whereby non-Vedic elements are introduced into the discourse without threatening the authority of the earlier Vedic tradition.

The conflation of Vedic and non-Vedic identities in the goddess-related materials found in this literature is indicative of a larger pattern of representing different goddesses as partial manifestations of a single female deity or principle that transcends all individual goddesses and is their source. As early as the fifth or sixth century of the Common Era,2 there begins to appear the notion of a single Great Goddess, Devi or Mahadevi, of whom all individual goddesses are discrete manifestations. Her identity is usually expressed in one of two ways: either a particular goddess, such as Durga, is lauded as the supreme female divinity of whom all other goddesses are partial manifestations, or else the existence of a single female reality is affirmed as the unique source of all goddesses and often nondivine female beings,

such as human women, as well who are described as her portions. 3

The Devi-Mahatmya

The theology of the Goddess is crystallized in a text of approximately the sixth century called the Devi-Mahatmya, which forms part of the Markandeya Purana (ca. 300-600 C. E.).4 This text extols the Great Goddess who is the source of all creation. Since she has manifold forms, she is given many epithets. Included among these are three that implicate her in cosmogony as they are related to or borrowed from philosophical materials concerning creation: *mahamaya*, "great *maya*," *prakrti*, and *sakti*.5 Thus the DeviMahatmya introduces categories from philosophy and equates them with the Goddess, although not in any systematic way.

In the Devi-Mahatmya, the Great Goddess is represented in ways that portray her as Brahman, although such an identification is not made explicitly in the text. On the one hand, she is described as the ultimate, highest reality, a description that is often applied in other texts to whichever god is considered to be Brahman. She is higher than Brahma, Visnu, or Siva. When she reveals herself, it is said that it only appears as if she is born, but in fact she is eternal.⁶ She is therefore never really born, and she never really dies. But she also has a form, for she is embodied as the Devi, the Goddess, and is portrayed as a great slayer of demons and protectress of the gods.

There are two important myths in the text that describe the manifestation of the Goddess. According to one account, two demons (*asuras*), Madhu and Kaitabha, are born from Visnu's ear while Visnu lies asleep on the primordial ocean at the end of the *kalpa*. They attempt to kill Brahma, who is seated on the lotus growing from Visnu's navel. Frightened, Brahma tries to waken Visnu, who does not respond. He is under the influence of the Goddess in her

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form as *yoganidra*, yoga-sleep. Brahma invokes the Goddess by extolling her and asks her to leave Visnu so that he may rise and help fight the demons. The Goddess complies; Visnu awakens and saves Brahma. Invoked by Brahma, Devi manifests herself.⁷ Another account details the manifestation of the Goddess from the collective energies of the gods. The *asura* Mahisa defeats the gods in battle and usurps them. The gods become angry and emit great heat-energy, *tejas*, which is produced from their anger. All their emitted *tejas* becomes unified and transforms into the Goddess.⁸ It might be significant that the term *tejas* is used in this context. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the Upanisads tend to portray *tejas* as the source of the primordial waters, which function as the matrix from which the created world issues forth. In the Devi-Mahatmya, the Goddess has similar attributes and functions. She is also said to abide in the form of earth (*mahi*) and to fill up the universe in the form of water (*ap*), echoing some of the Vedic motifs that we have explored, and she is described as the cause of all the worlds.⁹

Although there are no passages describing the mechanisms of cosmogony per se in the Devi-Mahatmya, nevertheless the Goddess is described as instrumental in creation. She plays three different cosmogonic roles. First, she is the supreme creator who wills creation and sends the cosmos forth. Thus she is the efficient cause of creation. As the immediate source of the universe, she is Mulaprakrti, primordial Prakrti.¹⁰ Thus she is the material cause, the basic matter from which the cosmos is formed. And, finally, she is creation itself. According to the text, the world is her form, and the entire universe with all its parts is ultimately identified with the Goddess.¹¹

In the Devi-Mahatmya, Devi is also called Sakti and Mahamaya. As Sakti, she is the power that makes possible not only the creation but also the maintenance and destruction of the universe.¹² She transcends the universe and controls its rhythms. Yet she is also immanent, for it is said

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that she abides in all beings in the form of *sakti* and is described as the *sakti* of all that is.¹³ Coburn observes that in the Devi-Mahatmya, *sakti* is something that the Devi *is* as well as something that each individual deity *has*.¹⁴ As this universal-abiding Sakti, she is present everywhere and in everything. The Goddess is also extolled as Mahamaya and is described as both creative and deluding:

Indeed, this venerable goddess Mahamaya, having forcibly seized the minds of even those who are knowledgeable, delivers them over to delusion. This entire movable and immovable world is created by her.¹⁵

As Coburn has also noted, in this text the principle of *maya* is sometimes equated with the principle of *prakrti*, an equation that we have seen made before in the Upanisads and Bhagavad-Gita.¹⁶ Thus the Goddess is called Mahamaya, for example, and as such is designated "the *prakrti* of all, manifesting the triad of *gunas*."¹⁷ As Mahamaya/Prakrti also, the Goddess is a singular and universal phenomenon.

Many scholars have noted the importance of the Devi-Mahatmya in establishing the identity of a Great Goddess. Coburn, for example, remarks that the Devi-Mahatmya is "not the earliest literary fragment attesting to the existence of devotion to a goddess figure, but it is surely the earliest in which the object of worship is conceptualized as Goddess, with a capital G."¹⁸ We certainly do not wish to dispute the text's centrality in this regard. It is important, nonetheless, to look

at the Devi-Mahatmya in the general context of the Brahmanical tradition, and especially the Puranas, for the Devi-Mahatmya does not exist in a vacuum. The formulation of the Great Goddess in this text is already somewhat influenced by Vedic-Brahmanical themes and narrative structures of the type that we have seen, and the identification of the Goddess as *sakti*, *maya*, and *prakṛti* in this text must be understood in relation to these larger patterns. In terms of the ways in which it depicts the essential identity of the Goddess, the Devi-Mahatmya is not anomalous; it is the

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earliest and among the most forceful expressions of a theology of a Great Goddess, but this theology is adopted and adapted to at least some degree by later texts, both Sakta and non-Sakta.

Cosmogony and Goddesses in the Puranas

In several of the Puranas that postdate the Devi-Mahatmya, the tendency toward the conflation of non-Vedic and Vedic elements and the introduction of the notion of a single Great Goddess combined with the incorporation of philosophical categories into mythological narratives contributes to a recasting of cosmogonic accounts that absorbs different goddesses into the mechanisms of creation and equates them with the cosmogonic principles *sakti*, *prakṛti*, and *maya* or *mahamaya*. Even where the accounts of cosmogony themselves do not explicitly identify specific structures as feminine, passages elsewhere in the text often refer to these principles and identify them with a female divinity. In order to understand how such notions develop and are articulated, it is necessary to place them within the context of certain observations about post-Vedic cosmogonies in general and Puranic cosmogonies in particular.

The accounts of creation in post-Vedic texts do not abandon either the essential structures or the basic themes found in Vedic cosmogonies. Like their predecessors, post-Vedic creation narratives maintain two distinct phases of creation. Holdrege has noted that the account of cosmogony given in the Manu-Smṛti (ca. second century B. C. E. -C. E.) presents a basic, two-stage pattern that marks a transition from Vedic to later post-Vedic cosmogonies. It borrows themes from earlier Vedic cosmogonies but reworks them, and the newer account provides a core narrative upon which later cosmogonies then elaborate: 19

This was covered with darkness, undiscerned, without any distinctive marks, incomprehensible by reason, un-

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knowable, as if completely asleep. Then the divine Selfborn (Svayambhu), unmanifest, making this the gross elements and so on manifest, appeared with energy set into motion, dispersing the darkness. He who is to be perceived nonsensuously, subtle, unmanifest, eternal, consisting of all creatures, and inconceivable, he alone appeared of his own accord. In the beginning, desiring to give rise to various kinds of beings from his own body, meditating (*abhi dhyai*), he created the waters alone and placed his seed in them. That (seed) became a golden egg (*haima anda*) having splendor equal to the sun. In that (egg), he himself was born as Brahma, the grandfather of the whole world. The waters are called *narah*, (for) the waters, indeed, are the offspring of Nara. Since they were his first abode (*ayana*), he is thus named Narayana. From that which was the unmanifest, eternal cause, which is both real and unreal, was produced that Purusa, who is celebrated in this world as Brahma. He, the divine one, having remained in that egg for a full year, by himself alone, divided that egg in two with his own thought. From those two halves he fashioned heaven and earth, between them the midregions, the eight points of the horizon, and the eternal abode of the waters.

In the first stage, the unmanifest, divine source of creation appears as the self-existent Narayana who brings forth the waters and plants his seed in them. The seed becomes a golden egg (*haima anda*). In the second stage, Narayana then enters the egg and is born from it as Brahma (Purusa), the progenitor of the worlds, who then fashions creation. This account retains many of the themes found in early cosmogonies: a two-stage creative process similar to that noted by Kuiper with respect to Vedic cosmogonies, and themes such as the primordial waters, the cosmic egg, and so forth. Similar accounts of creation are given in Harivamsa 1. 23-27 and in the Matsya Purana, one of the

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earliest Puranas (ca. 200-400 C. E.). 20 Most of the Puranic cosmogonies, however, while adopting this basic two-phase scheme are much more elaborate.²¹

It is difficult to make too many broad generalizations regarding the Puranas because of the volume of literature that is recognized as belonging to this category and because of the variety of perspectives that are represented within it. The Brahmanical tradition recognizes eighteen major (Maha-) and eighteen minor (Upa-) Puranas, although there is some disagreement over exactly which Puranas belong in which category.²² Many of the Puranas can be classified according to their sectarian perspectives. Visnu and Siva are the primary deities celebrated in the Maha-Puranas, and many of these are clearly Vaisnava or Saiva, promoting one or the other god as the highest deity of the Hindu pantheon and subordinating all other divinities to the one receiving prime favor. Thus, for example, the Visnu Purana (ca. 300-500 C. E.)²³ celebrates Visnu as the supreme divinity and sees Siva as merely an aspect of Visnu, whereas the Linga Purana (ca. 700-1000 C. E.) adopts the opposite perspective. Four of the Upa-Puranas and portions of different Maha-Puranas are essentially Sakta in orientation and elevate the Goddess to the highest position in the divine hierarchy. Several Puranas, such as the Kurma (ca. 550-800 C. E.), are cross-sectarian, and others, such as the Markandeya, cannot be classified as having any clear sectarian interests.

Certain generalizations regarding the Puranas are made within the tradition itself. They are characterized as a class of text that treats five different kinds of subjects: creation of the cosmos (*sarga or prakrtasarga*), re-creation of the cosmos after dissolution (*pratisarga or visarga*), genealogies of kings and sages (*vamsa*), Manu-intervals (*manvantara*), and accounts of the dynasties of great kings and sages (*vamsanucarita*). Since these five types of subjects are considered to be the essential contents of the Puranas, they are called the *pancalaksana* or "five characteristics. " In truth, these five

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items constitute very little of what is actually contained in the Puranas as a whole. All of the major Puranas, nevertheless, contain materials regarding creation.

The Puranic accounts of the two stages of cosmogony, primary creation (*sarga or prakrta sarga*) and secondary creation (*pratisarga or visarga*), are understood in relation to endlessly repeating cycles of time within which the universe is continually created, dissolved, and re-created. Each cycle of four ages or *yugas* is called a *mahayuga* and comprises four increasingly unstable *yugas* called Sat or Kṛta (1, 728, 000 years), Dvāpara (1, 296, 000 years), Treta (864, 000 years), and Kali (432, 000 years). ²⁴ At the end of every *mahayuga*, the earth is submerged under water. One thousand of these *mahayuga* cycles constitute a *kalpa*, which is a single day in the life of Brahma the creator. At the end of each *kalpa*, Brahma goes to sleep and a minor dissolution occurs; when he reawakens, he ushers in a new cycle of secondary creation. At the end of Brahma's lifetime, which consists of one hundred years of Brahma days and nights, there is a major dissolution, after which a new primary creation takes place. The entire cycle of creations and dissolutions continues eternally.

To best understand the place of the feminine principle in the process of creation, one must distinguish among not only different levels of cosmogony but also the different interpretive inflections that diverse Puranas give to their accounts. In the remainder of this chapter we will explore the role and function of the feminine principle in the different Puranas' versions of cosmogony according to the essential patterns that are found throughout the various Puranic accounts. Beginning with the most basic patterns pertaining to both primary and secondary creation, we will then investigate how the feminine principle is incorporated into this pattern such that the idea of a Great Goddess emerges.

Our analysis will be organized thematically according to the degree to which the Goddess is integrated into cosmo-

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gonic speculation, but within these broad thematic categories we will generally proceed historically. It is well known by scholars studying the Puranas that the dating of these texts is fraught with difficulties. As C. Mackenzie Brown notes, because of the fluid nature of the Puranas and the way in which they mix new and old materials, they are something of a text-historian's nightmare, and he asserts that the dating of individual Puranas and the various parts of these Puranas "has

become something of a game, a game which some scholars, perhaps not unwisely, refuse to play. " 25 While not wishing to enter too deeply into the fray, we will nevertheless attempt to respect the relative chronology of the texts as dictated by scholarly consensus to the extent that this is possible.

First, we will explore various explanations of primary creation in many of the Puranas for example, the Markandeya, Visnu, and Brahmanda (ca. 400-600 C. E.) 26 Puranas which adopt either Samkhya categories or those of the Upanisads and Advaita Vedanta philosophy, subsuming these categories under a theistic perspective. The supreme divinity, Visnu or Siva, is both *Nirguna* (without qualities) and *Saguna* (with qualities) Brahman. On the *nirguna* level, the favored deity is usually described as transcending and incorporating both *purusa* and *prakrti*. As *Saguna* Brahman, he is also often identified as *Purusa*, an appellation that is used more as a proper name than as a designation of an impersonal principle. When *prakrti* is disturbed, the twenty-three remaining *tattvas* begin to evolve, and the process of creation begins. Other accounts, such as some of those found in the Bhagavata Purana (ca. 800-1000 C. E.), emphasize the uniqueness of God, either Visnu or Siva identified as Brahman, and describe primary creation as a result of Brahman's primordial impulse to create. This impulse is usually called *sakti* or the power of *maya* possessed by Brahman. These two different explanations are often conflated such that *prakrti* becomes identified in some way with Brahman's *maya* or *sakti*. Several of the Puranic cos-

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mogonies simply lay out these mechanisms of creation without explicitly introducing the feminine element.

We will then turn to the standard accounts of secondary creation set forth in most of the Puranas. Secondary creation begins after the *tattvas* are gathered together in the form of a cosmic egg that resides in the primordial waters and contains the universe in incipient form. Brahma the creator is born from the egg and fashions the three worlds; following this, he then proceeds to create animate and inanimate beings. Thus there are two stages of secondary creation. In the first phase, the account of the formation of the different worlds, the old Vedic theme of the waters as the cosmic womb reappears. In the second phase, the feminine principle is introduced as necessary for the creation of individual beings, especially humans, to continue evolving. At a certain point, the whole process comes to a standstill, for Brahma's progeny, which he has created by himself up to this point, have no interest in furthering creation. The body of Brahma then splits into female and male portions. The sexual interaction of female and male leads to the production of more prolific beings. Thus the introduction of the female element at this point reinvigorates the entire process of creation.

Third, we will investigate the accounts narrated in sectarian Vaisnava and Saiva contexts, such as those found in the Garuda (ca. 850-1000 C. E.) 27 and Linga Puranas, in which the feminine principle is absorbed explicitly into the mechanisms of creation on the primary level and is identified with certain cosmogonic and cosmological structures that are borrowed from philosophical discourse. Generally, the power (*sakti* or *maya*) of whichever god is identified as Brahman according to the sectarian perspective of the text or passage is described as the catalyst of creation and is homologized with the female divinity or divinities associated with the supreme male deity. Samkhya categories are also used, and *prakrti*, which is often seen as evolved from *sakti* in some way, is identified as another aspect of the same

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goddess or goddesses. When the feminine principle is explicitly represented in the *sarga*, accounts of the *pratisarga* sometimes incorporate it by identifying certain principles on the lower levels of creation with the higher feminine principle. Although the structure is essentially the same in most of the accounts that are explored in this section, we will consider the accounts given in Vaisnava and Saiva contexts separately since they differ with respect to the identities of the divinities involved.

Finally, we will turn to look at the Devi-Bhagavata Purana (ca. 1000-1200 C. E.), which is a Sakta Purana. 28 The same basic themes regarding the incorporation of the feminine on the levels of both primary and secondary creation persist in this text yet, in following the path laid out by the Devi-Mahatmya, the Devi-Bhagavata identifies the highest divinity and ultimate reality not as Visnu or Siva but as the Great Goddess. 29 She is identified as Brahman, both without qualities (*nirguna*) and with qualities (*saguna*), but she is also consistently described as *sakti*, *maya*, and *prakrti*. Thus although in this text the Great Goddess takes the place of Visnu or Siva in the non-Sakta Puranas as Brahman, we find the same basic

structures with respect to the cosmogonic process.

Primary Creation (Sarga): Basic Cosmogony

Samkhya-Type Accounts of Cosmogony

In her book *Cosmogonies Puraniques*, Madeleine Biardeau identifies a basic pattern of primary creation that is found in several Puranas, including the Vayu (ca. 300-500 C. E.), Visnu, Markandeya, Brahmanda, Agni (ca. 800-900 C. E.), Padma (ca. 850-950 C. E.), and Brahma Puranas, among others.³⁰ This pattern adopts the basic themes of earlier orthodox cosmogonies but identifies mythic elements with philosophical constructs such that categories borrowed from Samkhya are recast in a theistic framework. According to

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these accounts, two entities that are considered to be distinct yet inseparable are present at the dawn of creation. They are complementary elements and, Biardeau maintains, cannot be conceived apart from one another. ³¹ These two entities are essentially the *pradhana/prakrti* and *purusa* of Samkhya, although they have numerous epithets.³²

In these accounts, as in Samkhya, *pradhana/prakrti* is the subtle, unmanifest, material principle of creation from which the cosmos evolves. With some slight variation, the process of cosmogony described in these passages parallels that described in the Samkhya-Karika and other Samkhya philosophical texts: the *gunas* of *pradhana/prakrti* are disturbed, giving rise to intellect, which is generally called *mahat* (not *buddhi*) in the Puranas, which in turn gives rise to *ahamkara*. Usually a threefold *ahamkaravaikarika*, *taijasa*, and *bhutadiis* posited based on the three *gunassattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas* of *pradhana/prakrti*. From the triple *ahamkara*, the remaining *tattvas* evolve.³³ The principal gods are also produced at this stage of creation.

In relation to Vedic cosmogonies, as well as the account given in Manu-Smṛti, *prakrti* replaces the primordial waters in these Puranic cosmogonies as the unmanifest, subtle material matrix from which creation evolves. Just as the waters appear as primal soup or subtle matter in the first stage of Vedic cosmogonies, in the Puranas *prakrti* appears in this capacity at the dawn of primary creation. Thus in these accounts *prakrti* plays a role parallel to that of the undifferentiated primordial waters in the Vedic accounts.

Purusa is the witness of creation and is often identified with the *saguna* form of the supreme divinity, usually Visnu in this group of Puranas. Whereas the process of evolution in Samkhya philosophy is catalyzed by the presence of *pradhana/prakrti* before the passive *purusa* theme that appears to be adopted by certain Puranic accounts³⁴ other types of explanations are also given. Many Puranas present Purusa as an active agent and identify him as the lord of creation who himself willfully sets in motion the whole

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cosmogonic process. According to the Brahma Purana (ca. 1200-1400 C. E.), for example, Purusa, who is also called Brahma, Narayana, and the self-born (Svayambhu), engages himself in the act of creation and evolves the universe out of *pradhana*:

Pradhana is the eternal, unmanifest cause that is of the nature of existence (*sat*) and nonexistence (*asat*). The lord (Isvara), Purusa, produced the universe. . . . Then the self-born lord (Bhagavan) wished to create varieties of beings from it (*pradhana*). He produced waters alone at the beginning. ³⁵

In other accounts, both *pradhana/prakrti* and *purusa* are portrayed as more passive principles, and the supreme divinity presiding over both activates the process. In these accounts, *purusa* tends to be portrayed more as an impersonal principle than as a personal form of the supreme deity. Thus, for example, Visnu Purana 2. 29-30 contains an account in which Hari (Visnu), who is Brahman, enters *prakrti* and *purusa*, which are forms of him, and thus stimulates the evolution of the *tattvas*.

When the time of creation (*sarga*) had arrived, having entered into *pradhana* and *purusa*, the perishable and

imperishable (*vyayavyaya*), by means of his own desire, Hari agitated them. Just as odor (*gandha*) is produced, agitating the mind merely by its presence and not from any operation of the mind itself, thus the supreme lord (Paramesvara) (produced the world).

One passage in the Markandeya Purana asserts similarly that the supreme lord enters into *purusa* and *prakrti* and agitates them with his supreme power (*para yoga*).³⁶ In Agni Purana 17. 2, likewise, Visnu enters both *prakrti* and *purusa* and agitates them in order to begin creation. In all these cases, *prakrti* is the material cause of creation but is never the efficient cause or willing agent of creation. Whenever an efficient cause is designated, some outside agent is said to

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act upon *prakrti* in some way to cause the *tattvas* to evolve. *Prakrti* is rather the subtle matrix that is the ultimate material source of the manifest universe. While many of these accounts integrate theological and narrative material with philosophical material by equating *purusa* with the supreme divinity Visnu in this group of texts, who is male in his manifest (*saguna*) form the principle of *pradhana/prakrti* is not as well integrated. Most of the epithets used to designate the material principle are impersonal and are devoid of explicit mythological or theological connotations. Nevertheless, there appears to be some tendency in these texts to identify *pradhana/prakrti* as feminine. The Visnu Purana, for example, describes *pradhana/prakrti* as the womb of the world (*jagadyoni*), and the Markandeya Purana describes Brahma as the lord or husband (*pati*) of *prakrti*.³⁷

After the *tattvas* evolve out of *pradhana/prakrti*, they are gathered together in a single mass, forming a cosmic egg in which the potential universe is contained in seed form.

Reconciliation of Competing Philosophical Systems in Accounts of Primary Creation

While this basic cosmogonic pattern is found with slight variation in several of the Puranas, other accounts of creation elaborate upon this system still further. In some Puranic cosmogonies, there is a tendency toward conflation of philosophical ideas that attempts to reconcile competing philosophical systems. Thus while the categories of Samkhya are usually retained, those of the Upanisads and Advaita Vedanta philosophy are grafted onto the foundational system. One of the most obvious indications of this kind of synthesizing of categories is the tendency to introduce the notion of an essential power, *sakti* or *maya*, of the god that is responsible for creation and to equate it or at least in some way associate it with *pradhana/prakrti*. When the term *maya* is used in the cosmogonic context of these texts, its

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meaning tends to resonate with the meanings of the term prominent in the Vedic literature and Bhagavad-Gita indicating the creative capacity of Brahman. The use of the term *maya* to indicate "illusion" or "delusion," however, a meaning of the term that is emphasized in Advaita Vedanta, also appears in the Puranas in cosmogonic contexts. Nevertheless, as illusion or delusion, *maya* is also essentially creative, for, according to Vedanta, it is on account of Brahman's power (*sakti*) of *maya* that the world is said to appear as real, that is, to be created in a provisional sense.

The best examples of the conflation of systems are found in the descriptions of creation in the Bhagavata Purana. In this text, Visnu is lauded as the highest divinity, especially in his form as Krsna. As supreme lord, he is called Brahman or Bhagavan. Daniel Sheridan has noted that the Bhagavata Purana is essentially nondualist in orientation and adopts the basic metaphysical position of Advaita Vedanta.³⁸ The world is thus seen as ultimately indistinct from Brahman. Because of its nondualist emphasis, the text tends to downplay the Samkhya cosmogonic scheme, which is essentially dualist. Rather, the tendency of the Upanisads and Advaita Vedanta to view the manifestation of the world as a function of God's power a power that is ultimately identical with God and the terminology associated with such views are adopted by the text and adapted to its sectarian perspective. The term used to designate this creative power is either *maya* or *sakti*. Thus, for example, we are told that Visnu/Krsna creates all beings out of the five elements by means of his *maya* or, in a similar vein, that he creates all beings by means of his own *sakti*.³⁹ The essentially dualistic framework of Samkhya along with its categories are then subsumed under the Bhagavata Purana's monistic perspective, resulting in a tendency to identify *pradhana/prakrti* with *maya*, a tendency that we have also seen in the Upanisads and Bhagavad-Gita as well as the Devi-Mahatmya.

In the first book, for example, we find the following description of creation:

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Although he is without qualities (*aguna*), he, the lord Bhagavan alone, created this (universe) in the beginning through his own *maya*, which has both real and unreal form and consists of the three *gunas*. Having entered into these three *gunas*, which have come forth by means of it [*maya*], he who is manifest by means of consciousness (*vijñāna*) appears as if possessed of the three *gunas*. 40

In this passage, the term *maya* seems to designate both Visnu's power to create and the material principle from which creation flows. *Maya* is described as both an aspect of Bhagavan that is beyond creation and, when activated, as the immediate source of creation that assumes the role of *pradhana/prakṛti*. The identification between *maya* and *prakṛti* is evident from the description of *maya* as consisting of three *gunas*, a description that is usually applied to *prakṛti*.⁴¹ In the third book, a similar kind of equation occurs, only here the term *śakti* also enters into play. The *śakti* of Bhagavan, which lies dormant, is identified with *maya*.

In the beginning, Bhagavan alone was here. . . . [A]ll his powers (*śakti*) were asleep, (although) his consciousness (*drś*) was awake. This energy (*śakti*) of that all-seeing one, of the nature of both existence (*sat*) and nonexistence (*asat*), (and) called *maya*, is that by means of which the lord produced this world, oh eminent one. When this *maya* consisting of the *gunas* was disturbed by the force of time, Visnu, who is possessed of virility/energy (*virya*), placed in it (his) semen/energy (*virya*) as Purusa in the form of the Self (Atman). From that unmanifest (*avyakta*) arose the *tattva* intellect (*mahat*).⁴²

Both *śakti* and *maya* designate the creative power of Bhagavan.⁴³ They also denote the same reality that is designated by the term *prakṛti* in other contexts and to indicate the unmanifest cause of creation consisting of the *gunas*.

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The description of Bhagavan placing his *virya* in *maya* is similar to the description of Svayambhu planting his seed in the waters in the Manu-Smṛti's, Harivamśa's, and Matsya Purāṇa's cosmogonies. Thus the role of *maya* in this passage, like that of the waters in the other passages, is to be the maternal womb receiving the masculine seed of creation. Also, as in the other accounts, this kind of primordial insemination sets in motion the process of creation that results in the formation of the cosmic egg. The Bhagavata Purāṇa's account, however, is more elaborate than the earlier accounts and goes on to describe the evolution of the various *tattvas*.⁴⁴ The use of the term *virya* in this passage is also quite interesting. Although *virya* can mean semen, it also means power or energy, and in Pāñcarātra, a Tantric Vaiṣṇava movement, it has a technical meaning as one of the six qualities of Visnu. As we shall see, the description given in this account of Bhagavan placing his *virya* in *maya* parallels another given in a roughly contemporaneous Vaiṣṇava Purāṇa, the Garuḍa, which is influenced by Pāñcarātra.

In the Bhagavata Purāṇa, the understanding of cosmogony as a result of the activation of God's power is conflated with Sāṃkhya's understanding of creation as a result of the activation of *pradhana/prakṛti* before *purusa*. Because of the influence of Advaita Vedānta on this text, however, creation is not always deemed to be truly real since only Bhagavan is real in an absolute sense. Thus *maya* as the creative power of the Godhead is also described as a power of delusion on account of which there appears existence, despite the nonexistence of the world as an independent reality.⁴⁵ This dual understanding of *maya* as both a creative capacity and a power of delusion, since the creation that *maya* ushers in is not fully real, persists throughout the Purāṇas wherever the influence of Advaita Vedānta is present.

The Kurma Purāṇa also contains an account of cosmogony that combines Sāṃkhya categories with those of

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Vedānta. In this text, however, the essential metaphysical orientation is not thoroughly nondualist but adopts a more moderate perspective. At the beginning of creation, unmanifest Brahman gives rise to three principles: time (*kāla*),

pradhana/prakrti, and *purusa*. These three principles are described as inherent in Brahman and are both identical to and different from him. 46 *Prakrti* gives birth to the entire universe beginning with *mahat*, which is identified with both *ahamkara* and *Atman*. *Purusa* is described as superior to *prakrti* and devoid of creative proclivities; it becomes involved in creation, however, because of ignorance, which is produced from the union of *prakrti* and time.47

This description of the basic cosmogonic framework is immediately followed by another that is similar but uses categories strictly from Vedanta, eliminating the Samkhya elements from the account of creation altogether. Brahman describes himself as the unmanifest, eternal source of the universe who is the master of his own *maya*.

There is no stationary or moving being in the world (who) is eternal, except for me alone, the highest lord, unmanifest, having the form of space. United with time, I, that god, consisting of *maya* (and) possessing *maya*, send forth (*srj*) and withdraw (*sam hr*) this whole world.48

The supreme Brahman who creates, preserves, and destroys the worlds is said to be the possessor of *maya*, which is nothing but his power (*sakti*). The term *maya* designates Brahman's creative power but also denotes the power of delusion. In the latter case, it is said that Brahman dispels *maya* with the help of his highest power (*para sakti*), which is knowledge (*vidya*).

I [Brahman] alone am the destroyer, creator (and) maintainer (of creation). I am the possessor of *maya*. *Maya*, which deludes the world, is my power (*sakti*).

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And that (power) which is, indeed, my highest power (*parasakti*), is called knowledge (*vidya*). Seated in the hearts of yogins, I dispel *maya* with it (*vidya*). 49

In this passage, *maya* and *vidya* are understood as opposing capacities or *saktis* of Brahman; whereas *maya* tends to delude, *vidya* illuminates. Although *maya* and *vidya* are the most important of Brahman's powers, there are others as well. Brahman is said to be the root of all *saktis*, which he brings forth. Three of these *saktis* are evolved and assume forms as the creator (Brahma), preserver (Narayana), and destroyer (Rudra) of creation.50

Creation is described yet again a bit further on in the text in an account that simply mixes the Samkhya-type of system and the Vedanta-type of system together. The lord of creation (Isvara) describes himself as the supreme Brahman, inherent in all phenomena and the originator of *maya* (*mayattvapravarttaka*). The cosmogonic process is set into motion by his *sakti*, which is described specifically as his power of action (*kriyasakti*):

Residing within all beings, I set this whole world into motion. This is my power of action (*kriyasakti*). It is that by which this universe, following after my own nature, is stirred. . . . I have no beginning, middle, or end; I am the originator of *maya*. At the beginning of creation (*sarga*), I agitate both *pradhana* and *purusa*. From these two, which are joined together, the universe arises in succession, in the order beginning with *mahat*. . . . I am Bhagavan, the lord (Isa), my own light, eternal, the supreme Self (Paramatman), the supreme Brahman; there is nothing other than me.51

When his *sakti* is activated, Brahman agitates *pradhana* and *purusa*, who are united; and from these two principles the entire universe, beginning with the *tattva mahat*, evolves. This is the scheme of evolution according to Samkhya. Yet the text also states that Brahman alone exists ("there is

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nothing other than me") and is associated with *maya*. Thus Samkhya and Vedanta categories are mixed together.

In these texts, the terms *maya* and *sakti* are used in such a way that they create a link between the creator and his creation. *Maya* and *sakti* are associated both with the efficient cause of creation, Brahman himself, and the material cause, *prakrti*, even though the precise nature of the relationships among these different elements is not always systematically articulated.

Secondary Creation (Pratisarga) 52

Creation of the Worlds

After the different *prakṛta* creations are evolved, they are assembled into a cosmic egg. Brahman abides within the egg, which floats on the primordial waters, and infuses it with life. After a time, the egg hatches, and Brahman is reborn as Brahma the creator. Brahma then takes the egg and divides it, forming the three worlds.⁵³ When the account of creation describes not the successive stages of primary and secondary creation but rather focuses on a *pratisarga* following a minor dissolution, it is frequently said that Brahma emerges from a lotus that comes out of the navel of Visnu-Narayana, who is sleeping on the serpent Sesa in the primordial waters. Visnu or Brahma, who is often described as a manifestation of Visnu, takes the form of a boar and dives under the waters to rescue the earth, which is submerged beneath them. Brahma then fashions the different worlds.⁵⁴

A fairly elaborate account of the creation of the worlds in the *pratisarga* is given in the Visnu Purana. At the end of the *kalpa*, Visnu-Narayana, who is Brahman, lies asleep in the midst of the primordial waters. Concluding that the earth is lying within the waters, he creates a second self in the shape of a boar in order to rescue it and plunges into the waters.

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When the world was nothing but ocean, the lord of beings (Prajapati, = Narayana), understanding through reflection that the earth was situated within the waters, wished to raise her up. He made another form of himself, just as (he had done) formerly in the beginnings of (other) *kalpas*, first as a fish and then a tortoise. Thus he took the form of a boar. ⁵⁵

The goddess earth, seeing him beneath the surface of the primordial ocean, praises him. Narayana in the form of a boar, pleased with the earth's flattering words, grabs her with his tusks and lifts her up. He then proceeds to create the different worlds.⁵⁶

Some accounts of the *pratisarga* do not follow this schema precisely but vary it somewhat according to the perspective of the text. The Bhagavata Purana's account of this stage of creation, for example, adapts it to emphasize the dependence of creation on Bhagavan. The whole universe is described as submerged in water, and Narayana lies asleep on Sesa in the midst of the primordial waters, having deposited all subtle bodies in himself. While he sleeps, he keeps his *śakti* in the shape of time (*kala*) active. At the appropriate time, the worlds in the form of subtle matter emerge out of his navel and become a lotus. Visnu himself enters the lotus and is reborn from it as Brahma. Looking around him, Brahma sees only the lotus in the midst of the waters; he dives into it, seeking the ground from which the lotus has sprung. Brahma fails to find the earth. Instead, Visnu-Narayana instructs Brahma to practice austerities (*tapas*) and to concentrate on and offer worship to him. Brahma does this and sees the cosmos existing in potential form resting in Visnu-Narayana. He then enters the corolla of the lotus and divides it into three portions, thus fashioning the three worlds.⁵⁷

There are a number of different Vedic themes that are adopted by the Puranas in the description of creation at this level, and the place, role, and identification of certain

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elements with feminine principles or deities persist. The theme of the female waters, *ap*, as the maternal womb that contains the primordial embryo/germ or *egga* theme that is found not only in the Vedas but in the accounts of creation in the Manu-Smṛti and Harivamśa as well—continues to appear. The rescue of the earth from beneath the primordial waters, a theme that is first found in the Yajur-Veda, also persists, as does the understanding of the earth as a goddess.

Creation of Progeny

After Brahma creates the worlds, he decides to create different species of beings. Through contemplation, he fashions five classes of secondary creations, called the *vaikṛta* creations, which include insentient and immobile creatures, animals, divine beings, and humans. ⁵⁸ These five *vaikṛta* creations are juxtaposed with three other creations, namely, *mahat*, the *tanmatras*, and the *vaikarika* creations—probably the *buddhindriyas* (hearing, touching, seeing, tasting, smelling)

and *karmendriyas* (speaking, grasping, walking, excreting, procreating), both of which are said to emerge from the *vaikarika* form of *ahamkarawhich* are deemed *prakṛta*. Dissatisfied, he fashions another creation, called *kaumara*, which is both *prakṛta* and *vaikṛta*. This *kaumara* creation appears to consist of Brahma's mind-born (*manasa*) sons.⁵⁹ Other passages describe Brahma's attempts to create different kinds of beings *śaśuras*, *devas*, *pitr̥s*, and humans from his own body. On every occasion, he abandons the body with which each class of beings is made and takes up a new one with which to create the next class of beings.⁶⁰ Other creatures such as animals, *yaksas*, *raksasas*, and so on are produced from his body in a similar manner.

The creations that Brahma fashions are barren. Thus Brahma finds that the process he has toiled to set in motion is in danger of coming to an abrupt end, and he seeks other means by which his creation can be furthered.

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Brahma divides his own body into two portions, one of which becomes male and the other of which becomes female. The Brahma Purana, for example, states:

Then the beings produced (by Brahma) did not multiply. Dividing his own body in two, he became a man with one half and a woman with (the other) half. He [the man] begot of her [the woman] various kinds of beings. ⁶¹

In some accounts, the male portion becomes Manu, and the female portion is named Satarupa, "she who has one hundred forms." ⁶² In several Puranas, including the Visnu Purana, the origin of Manu and Satarupa is cast in a slightly different context. Brahma sees that his mind-born sons are more interested in meditation than procreation. Realizing that his self-generated progeny will not reproduce, Brahma becomes angry. Out of his anger emerges Rudra, who is half male and half female.

They [Brahma's mind-born sons] (were) without attachment to the world, undesirous of progeny, filled with knowledge, without passion or envy. There arose in Brahma a great anger toward those ones who were indifferent to the creation of the world, (an anger that was) capable of burning up the three worlds. Oh sage, then everything, the whole triad of worlds, became exceedingly bright from the garland of flames rising up from his, Brahma's, anger. From his frowning forehead inflamed with anger sprang forth Rudra in a form that was half female and half male (*ardhanarinara*), fierce, bulky, (and) radiant as the midday sun.⁶³

Brahma commands Rudra to divide himself, which Rudra does; the male half divides into several parts, as does the female half. Usually, the male portions are numbered at eleven and become the eleven Rudras, although variable accounts appear. Inspired by Rudra's division of himself

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along the lines of gender, Brahma then creates (usually from himself) according to this model a man, Manu, who is often described as another form of Brahma himself, and a woman, Satarupa. ⁶⁴ They create sons and daughters through copulation. Brahma then gives their daughters to his nonfruitful, agamically generated progeny, who in turn produce their own children.

Another variation appears in the Matsya Purana. Seeing that his mind-born sons are not reproducing, Brahma seeks another avenue by which to carry on his work of creation. He invokes the goddess Savitri (Gayatri), who is called by many names, including the name Satarupa. She appears in the form of a woman from half of Brahma's body. Brahma falls in love with her, much to the distress of his mind-born sons, who consider her to be Brahma's daughter and thus find his love for her to be incestuous.⁶⁵

Having seen her, the lord trembled greatly, struck by the arrow of desire. And the lord of beings (Prajapati, = Brahma) said, "Oh, what a beautiful form! Oh, what a beautiful form!" Then (the mind-born sons,) headed by Vasistha, cried out, "(She is our) sister!" Brahma did not notice anything, except for the sight of her face. He said over and over, "Oh, what a beautiful form!"⁶⁶

Brahma marries her, and they beget progeny, beginning with Manu.⁶⁷

The introduction of the woman Satarupa in the process of creation catalyzes a shift from the use of asexual modes of production to the use of a sexual mode of reproduction through male/female copulation. The Padma Purana, for example, explicitly asserts that in ancient times, creation had been effected by volition (*samkalpa*), sight (*darsana*), and touch (*sparsa*); but after Pracetas Daksa, one of the mind-born sons of Brahma who marries the first-born daughter of Manu and Satarupa, creation is effected by coitus (*maithuna*).⁶⁸ Similarly, the Brahma Purana states that

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the beings created during the time of Narayana's creation as well as Manu's were not born of the womb (*ayonija*), but Satarupa delivered her progeny righteously (*dharmena*).⁶⁹ In another passage, a slightly different version of the story is given, and Daksa is born of Marisa, the mother of the lunar race. Daksa creates women, and it is only after this that procreation by means of coitus begins; prior to this, it is said that beings are born of volition, sight, and touch, as is also stated in the Padma Purana.⁷⁰ The introduction of Satarupa also catalyzes a shift from a barren creation to a fruitful one. Just as in the Brahmanas mind needs speech and Prajapati needs Vac, in the Puranas Brahma and Manu need Satarupa if creation is going to succeed.

The role of Satarupa in the production of beings in the *pratisarga* is similar to that of *prakṛti* in the *sarga* as the source of the *tattvas*. Just as the interaction of *prakṛti* with *purusa* stirs up the *gunas* of *prakṛti* and induces the evolution of the *tattvas*, which results in the formation of the *prakṛta* creations, the interaction of Manu and Satarupa spurs on the creation of fruitful progeny beginning in Satarupa's womb and insures the survival of the *vaikṛta* creations. The resemblance between *prakṛti* and Satarupa is noted in the Brahmada Purana, which makes an explicit connection between them. Satarupa is described both as created from *prakṛti* and as being herself *prakṛti*:

From half of the body of the one who was pleased with himself [Brahma] a woman issued forth. . . . That sensual woman was indeed created from *prakṛti*, (and) she was beautiful. She was called Satarupa (and) she was called thus again and again. . . . After dividing his own body in two, he [Brahma] became a man by one half. That woman Satarupa arose by his (other) half. She was Prakṛti, the mother (*dhatri*) of living beings.⁷¹

The Vayu Purana makes a similar equation but identifies *prakṛti* not with Satarupa but with the female side of Rudra,

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who has split into male and female halves at the behest of Brahma. This goddess divides herself into black and white forms. She has individual manifestations as different goddesses Lakṣmi, Sarasvatī, Uma, Gaurī, and so forth but she is also simply called Devī, implying that she is not just a goddess but is *the* Goddess.⁷² This passage thus advocates a doctrine of a Great Goddess who has many forms and is identified with a cosmogonic principle, but it has absorbed such ideas into the explanation of secondary, not primary, creation. The tendency to designate the female half of Rudra as Prakṛti or as the Great Goddess, as we shall see, is dominant in the Śaiva Puranas.

The identity of Satarupa and the goddess who is Rudra's female half with the principle *prakṛti* also indicates that in these contexts *prakṛti* is conceived to be female. The understanding of *prakṛti* as essentially feminine in gender is further borne out structurally, if we examine the diverse roles and manifestations of the male creative principle at different levels of creation and the interaction of diverse pairs of elements. Viṣṇu-Narayana takes the form of Puruṣa and is born in and from the cosmic egg as the creator Brahma. Brahma then re-creates himself as Manu. Correspondingly, Prakṛti is paired with Puruṣa; in relation to Brahma and the egg, she is replaced by the primordial, womb-like waters, whose role is clearly feminine. Finally, she is reborn as Satarupa and is paired with Manu. Thus on all levels, there are corresponding couplings. On at least one level, the final level, the pair is explicitly said to be a male/female couple. The gender identifications of Manu and Satarupa combined with the correlations of the different pairings on different levels and the various feminine associations with both *prakṛti* and the waters imply that *prakṛti* is understood to be female. *Prakṛti*, the waters, and Satarupa are all different manifestations of the feminine cosmogonic principle, even though gender identity is not always explicit.

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The Explicit Introduction of the Feminine Element in Creation: Prakrti/Sakti as the Consort of God

References Outside of Accounts of Cosmogony

In the Maha-Puranas, there is a tendency to equate the creative power of God, designated by the term *sakti* or *maya*, and/or the material foundation of creation, *pradhana*/ *prakrti*, with the goddess associated with the deity recognized in the text as supreme either Visnu or Siva outside of any cosmogonic context, even where such an equation does not occur within the accounts of creation themselves. In many of the Puranas, this conflation of philosophical categories and mythological elements with respect to the feminine principle is not always carried out consistently throughout the texts but is mentioned nevertheless in different places. Thus, for example, the Brahma Purana describes the goddess Sati, the consort of Siva, as *prakrti* and as the cause of the worlds, 73 even though this equation does not appear within the account of creation contained in the text. In the Bhagavata Purana, Laksmi is called Mahalaksmi, "great Laksmi, " and is explicitly equated with both the principle *prakrti* and Visnu's *maya*, sometimes described as *mayasakti*, "the power of *maya*. "

You [Visnu] are the lord of all, the ultimate cause of the world. She [Mahalaksmi] is subtle *prakrti* as well as the power of *maya* (*mayasakti*). . . . This goddess is the manifestation of the *gunas* (*gunavyakti*). . . . [T]he almighty goddess represents name and form (*namarupa*).⁷⁴

The appearance of such references indicates an attempt, however incomplete, to integrate more fully the philosophical cosmogonic and cosmological categories adopted by the Puranas with their essentially mythological orientation. As the Puranas equate the *purusa* of Samkhya or the Brahman of Upanisadic and Vedanta thought with the deity

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who is lauded as supreme in the particular text, it would follow that the complementary principle *pradhana*/*prakrti* or *sakti*/*maya* would be equated with the female consort of that deity. This impulse comes to fruition in several Puranas where such identifications are made explicit within the narration of cosmogony itself.

Integration of The Feminine Principle in Accounts of Cosmogony: Sarga and Pratisarga

The full integration of the feminine principle in the story of creation appears in several of the Puranas and indicates a more complete reconciliation of mythological and philosophical categories. In these texts, the direct source of creation *prakrti*, *sakti*, or *mayais* equated with the goddess appropriate to the sectarian perspective of the text, who is often celebrated as the supreme female divinity and the immediate cause of creation. She is also often identified more specifically as the source of all other goddesses and female forms within creation as well. The clear integration of the feminine principle into the mechanisms of creation and the identification of different goddesses with philosophical principles are inseparably connected to a theology of a Great Goddess who even in the non-Sakta Puranas is conceived to be as praiseworthy as the god with whom she is associated.

In several Vaisnava and Saiva Puranas, respectively, Visnu and Siva are extolled as supreme and are equated with the principles *purusa* and/or Brahman. The consorts of these deities, however, are equally elevated and represent the complementary principles. As *prakrti*, the Goddess is the material cause of creation. As *sakti* or *maya*, she is usually associated both with the material cause *prakrti*, with which she is frequently identified, and with the efficient cause, the creator himself who possesses and wields the power that is equated with the Goddess. In Sakta contexts, the Goddess is

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both the supreme Brahman who wills creation into being and the material cause, *prakrti*, which is the immediate source of the universe.

As part of the tendency to view different individual female forms as diverse manifestations of a single, supreme feminine principle identified as a Great Goddess (Mahadevi), some of these Puranas also explicitly identify the goddesses active on

the level of secondary creation (*pratisarga*) as manifestations of the feminine principle that is the source of primary creation (*sarga*). Some of the links that were implicit in other Puranas are now made explicit. In order to demonstrate these associations with the greatest clarity, we will treat together the accounts of *sarga* and *pratisarga* in each individual text. We will not include the accounts of secondary creation that do not differ significantly from the standard account given above.

As different sectarian perspectives influence the way in which cosmogony is narrated, one must consider Vaisnava, Saiva, and Sakta texts separately. The Kurma Purana, which is cross-sectarian, will be taken up in both the Vaisnava and the Saiva sections. We will begin our analysis by exploring different cosmogonies that celebrate the ultimate supremacy of Visnu or his incarnation as Krsna in five different Puranas: the Kurma, Varaha, Garuda, Narada, and Brahmavaivarta Puranas. In the first two instances, different levels of the Goddess's identity are articulated but are not clearly placed in any kind of cosmogonic sequence. The last three texts, however, tend to place different principles and aspects of the Goddess more clearly in a cosmogonic framework.

Vaisnava Puranas and Vaisnava Sections of Cross-Sectarian Puranas

The Kurma Purana is one of the earliest Puranas to clearly incorporate a goddess into descriptions of cosmogony. Laksmi, Visnu's spouse, is described as the power by which Visnu creates, the power by which he deludes his

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creation, and the material principle that serves as the immediate source of creation. These three functions correspond to those of *sakti*, *maya*, and *prakrti*, all of which are equated with Laksmi.

The text asserts that when the gods ask Visnu about the identity of Laksmi, he responds by identifying her as his highest power (*parama sakti*). This power is both creative and delusive. She is also described as the supreme *prakrti* that is the immediate source of the entire creation as well as the supreme *maya* of Visnu-Narayana.

She [Laksmi] is that supreme power (*parama sakti*) wholly consisting of/absorbed in me (*manmayi*), of the nature of Brahman, my beloved, endless *maya* by which this universe is deluded. Through her, I delude, swallow up, and recreate the whole world. . . . [D]epending on parts of her, the twice-born (and) the gods Brahma, Siva (Isana), and so forth have become possessed of power (*saktimat*). She is my entire power (*sarvasakti*). She is the source of the entire universe, *prakrti* possessing three *gunas*. 75

In response, Laksmi then reaffirms her identity as Visnu's supreme *maya*, asserting that there is ultimately no difference between herself and Visnu.⁷⁶ Such an assertion of equality between the supreme male and his consort is quite common in the Puranas, as we shall see, but in Vaisnava and Saiva contexts, it is always the male who is supreme. This is borne out in the fact that although it is said that ultimately there is no distinction at all between Sakti and the possessor of Sakti (*saktimat*, = Visnu/Krsna or Siva), nevertheless it is the male who possesses the Goddess. Sakti is never described as the possessor of her consort.

The identity of Laksmi with the creative/delusive power of Visnu and with *prakrti* is clearly indicated in the account of creation that follows shortly thereafter. This theory of creation does not follow the usual pattern but rather reflects another explanation of cosmogony that often appears

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in the Puranas alongside the Samkhya-type theory and in which Brahman produces Brahma, Visnu, and Siva the creator, preserver, and destroyer of the worlds at the beginning of the cycle. Brahma then proceeds to create the worlds. In the Kurma Purana's account, Visnu-Narayana awakens from his slumber and ponders creation. Grace (*prasada*) descends upon him, from which is born Brahma, the creator. Then Rudra is born from his anger. Following this, the goddess Laksmi appears.

Then came the goddess Sri (Laksmi). . . . Narayani, Mahamaya, imperishable Mulaprakrti sat by my side filling this (all) with her own majesty. Seeing her, the venerable Brahma, lord of the worlds, said to me, "Oh Madhava,

employ this beautiful one for the delusion of all beings, by means of whom this great creation of mine might prosper. " 77

These narrative elements are included in the text alongside the exposition of a Samkhya-type description of creation that does not explicitly identify *prakṛti* with Lakṣmi.⁷⁸

The identity of Lakṣmi as a cosmogonic principle in this section of the Kurma Purana is described on two levels. First, Lakṣmi is Viṣṇu's *śakti*, called *māyā*, which is an inherent part of Viṣṇu and is his creative and delusive power. Second, Lakṣmi is identified as Mulaprakṛti, which is separate from Viṣṇu. In this context, these different aspects of the Goddess are not clearly placed in any cosmogonic sequence.

A rather late section of the Varaha Purana (ca. 750-1500 C. E.)⁷⁹ also contains an account of a Great Goddess who is the source of creation. In this text, Viṣṇu-Narayana is extolled as the supreme deity. Brahma arises from him, and Rudra (Śiva) arises from Brahma. While Śiva is sporting with Gauri (Parvatī) and the *ganas* on Mount Kailasa, Brahma comes to him to ask for help in a confrontation with a demon. Brahma looks at Śiva and, at the same time, calls to his mind (*smṛ*) Narayana. The three become unified and

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gaze at one another, and from the unified gazes (*drṣṭi*) of the three gods, a girl having a divine form (*kumārī divyārūpīnī*) arises. This account echoes the account found in the Devi-Mahatmya where the Goddess is born from the unified energies (*tejas*) of the gods. Here too, the divine maiden represents the unified energies (*śakti*) of the three male divinities. The gods name her Trikālā, "three digits, " and ask her to assume three different forms. She thus becomes threefold, assuming a white, red, and black form. ⁸⁰ These three forms are correlated with the three primary male deities:

The bright body with beautiful hips is Brahmi, and creation comes forth from her auspiciously as ordained by Brahma's creative role. The beautiful, red-colored, middle body is the goddess Vaisnavī, who bears conch and disc. She is known as Kālā. She protects the whole universe and is called Viṣṇumāyā. The black-colored body, the goddess Raudrī, bears a trident and has a terrible face. She destroys the universe.⁸¹

The three colors of this goddess's different forms are those that are associated with the *guṇas* of *prakṛti*. Thus this goddess embodying the unified *śaktis* of the three primary gods of creation is implicitly, although not explicitly, identified with *prakṛti*. This implicit identification is further indicated by her correlation with material creation itself. She is called Sṛṣṭi, "creation, " and her three different forms are described as her different aspects. It is said that the entire world of movable and immovable objects is pervaded by her and that she is the origin of everything, the source of all gods and demons, all *yaksas*, *gandharvas*, *raksasas*, animals, and plants.⁸² Thus she is represented as being the foundation of all existing things. The identity of the goddess of creation with *prakṛti* is also implied in a later passage in which her three forms are correlated with those of the supreme Self (Paramatman), who is also said to acquire three forms.

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This highest goddess Sṛṣṭi, when white, is of sattvic nature and abides in Brahma. The very same one, when red, is of rajasic nature and is called Vaisnavī. The very same one, when black, is of tamasic nature and is called the goddess Raudrī. Just as the same supreme Self (Paramatman), although one, manifests itself as threefold [as Brahma, Viṣṇu, Śiva], so this power (*śakti*), although one, becomes threefold on account of particular functions.
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This passage explicitly correlates the three different manifestations of the goddess of creation, Sṛṣṭi, with not only the three colors associated with the *guṇas* of *prakṛti*, but also with the diverse qualities of the *guṇas*. Thus the identification of this goddess with *prakṛti* is again made implicitly through association. Elsewhere in the text, the equation is made explicitly but only with respect to one of her three forms, the *śakti* of Viṣṇu called Vaisnavī, who is lauded as the highest *śakti* and is identified as great delusion (Mahamāyā), the mother of the universe, Yogamāyā, Prakṛti, and Pradhana.⁸⁴ Given the Vaisnava orientation of the text, it is to be expected that the female form associated with Viṣṇu would be given supremacy over the forms associated with the other gods.

The goddess Srsti continues to play a significant role on the level of secondary creation as well. After her three forms are evolved, each disappears to pursue the practice of austerities. Brahma begins his process of creation, but he reaches a block and cannot progress.

Now for a long time, the lord of beings (Prajapati, = Brahma) undertook to produce progeny. While the strength of him who was engaged in producing (*srjat*) multiplied, his Brahma's mind-born progeny did not multiply. Then he thought, "What is this? My progeny aren't multiplying. " Then the god Brahma with his heart engaged in yoga, reflecting, brought to mind (*budh*) the maiden on that very holy white mountain.

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She was performing austerities (*tapas*), her sins being burned up by austerities. 85

Seeking a solution to his problem, Brahma seeks out this white-bodied form of Srsti, the form with which he is associated. When he finds her, he propitiates her and tells her that she may seek a boon. She in turn asks that Brahma make her present everywhere, a request to which Brahma complies. Srsti then dissolves herself in Brahma, and his creation begins to grow once again.⁸⁶ A similar account is given in another passage where Brahma, wishing to create different beings, enters into deep contemplation but cannot figure out what he should do. Frustrated, he becomes angry, and Rudra is born from this anger. Brahma gives Rudra Gauri as his wife and asks Rudra to create. Rudra, however, cannot seem to perform.

He himself, Brahma, the lord of beings, (was) filled with the greatest joy, having gotten that handsome woman for Rudra, whose body was without bounds. When it was time for creation, Brahma told him, "Oh, Rudra! Produce progeny!" Thus he commanded him again and again. (Rudra replied,) "I can't!" and he, the one possessing great strength, dove into the water.⁸⁷

Rudra goes off to do *tapas* in hopes that he will be able to perform more effectively afterwards. Brahma, however, is impatient; while Rudra is gone, Brahma takes Gauri and lodges her in his body. This leads to the creation of mind-born sons. Brahma then gives Gauri to his son Daksa to be Daksa's daughter.⁸⁸

In the materials concerning the goddess Srsti, there is a correlation between the function and identity of the feminine principle in primary creation and her role in secondary creation. As *sakti/prakrti*, the three-bodied goddess Srsti is the initial impulse that brings forth creation as well as the power that is responsible for the maintenance and destruction of the universe. Her creative role is repeated in the

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pratisarga, where she serves as the power with which Brahma is able to further his creation. As in the Kurma Purana, these different aspects of the Goddess are not clearly placed in any cosmogonic sequence.

In other Puranas, the identity of certain cosmogonic principles that function in primary creation as female is more clearly integrated into the Samkhya-type cosmogony. In these contexts, the sequence of events in creation and the levels of the Goddess are often, but not always, more clearly correlated. In the Garuda Purana, for example, Laksmi, Visnu's spouse, is explicitly identified with *prakrti/maya* and is incorporated into the account of primary creation on three levels: (1) Laksmi as the female form of Visnu and an integral, inseparable part of him; (2) Laksmi as *prakrti/maya*, the material foundation of the universe that is different from Visnu; and (3) Laksmi as a Great Goddess who is the source of the goddesses Sri, Bhu, and Durga. These three different levels of Laksmi's identity are incorporated into a description of the process of creation that involves three stages: (1) the initial impulse toward creation that is represented by the activation of Visnu's creative energy; (2) the depositing of this energy in *prakrti/maya*, which stirs up the three *gunas*; and (3) the commencement of the evolution of the *tattvas* from the activated *gunas*.

It is important to note that the term used in this account for Visnu's creative energy is not *sakti* but *virya*. As noted in the discussion of the Bhagavata Purana, the use of the term *virya* is consistent with the tenets of Pañcaratra, a Tantric Vaisnava movement that seems to have influenced this text. Pañcaratra and schools and sects based on Pañcaratra

recognize six qualities or *gunas* of Visnu-Narayana, who is recognized in this system as Brahman. The fifth of these *gunas* is *virya*, which is described as the ability of Brahman to remain changeless in spite of being the cause of creation. 89 In the Garuda Purana, *virya* represents the creative power of Brahman and plays the same role in the context in which this cosmogonic account is found, the Brahma-Kanda of the

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Garuda Purana's second part (Uttara-Khanda), as does *sakti* in some of the other accounts we have seen. It is noteworthy, however, that although Laksmi is identified as *prakrti*/ *maya* in the Garuda Purana's version of cosmogony, she does not seem to be explicitly identified as Visnu's *virya*. In fact, *virya* can also mean semen, and in this context the principle of creative energy is allied more with the power of male virility than with female creative potential.

In the text Krsna describes to Garuda the process by which Visnu places his energy (*virya*) in *maya*, which is described as consisting of three *gunzas*. Garuda asks whether Visnu's energy is the same as or different from Visnu. Krsna responds by telling him that the energy that Visnu deposits in *maya* is of the same nature as Visnu, but that, being material (*prakrta*), it is also a separate entity. Visnu's energy is thus both part of him and part of material creation, which is different from him. 90 Krsna continues:

Lord Vasudeva is of the nature of energy (*viryasvarupin*) in all places and in all times. If he were not possessed of all things, oh lord of birds, then he would not be both Isvara and Purusa.

He has two forms, one a female form and the other a male form, along with (other) unthinkable and thinkable powers. The two forms [male and female] are both possessed of power, oh lord of birds, and are to be thought of as being not different, indeed, the same (*samyak*).⁹¹

Visnu, here called Vasudeva, is described as having two forms, male and female, both of which are possessed of power (*viryavat*). Although the identity of the female form described here is not made clear, the text declares that the form of Sri (Laksmi) is reflected in the form of Hari (Visnu), thus implying that the female form of Visnu is Laksmi.⁹² It is also stated that Visnu can never be without Laksmi in any space or time, nor she without him, for the two are inseparable.⁹³

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This passage then goes on to describe the mechanisms by which the universe is created when Visnu deposits his *virya* in Laksmi. Here the term *virya* is associated more strongly with semen, and the placing of *virya* in Laksmi has sexual overtones. Krsna states that although the demons say that Laksmi is his power of illusion (*indrajala*), this is wrong. Rather, what they really mean is the thing called *maya*, which is simply the subtle form of *prakrti*.⁹⁴ The identification of Laksmi with the principle *maya/prakrti* is again implied at the end of the chapter where a passage that parallels the one describing Visnu depositing his energy/semen in Laksmi now states that Visnu deposits it in *maya*.

Lord Hari, who is called Purusa and is possessed of energy (*viryavat*), deposited that energy (*virya*) in *maya* and produced the three *gunas*.⁹⁵

Although the precise nature of the relationships among Laksmi, *prakrti* and *maya* is not explicitly articulated in this passage, parallel phrasing establishes an identity between Laksmi and *prakrti/maya* as the receptacle of Visnu's *virya*. Laksmi is both the female form of Visnu that is inseparable from him and is also equated on a lower level with the material source of creation, *prakrti/maya*, which is separate from Visnu.

Whereas these two levels of identity represent the abstract forms of Laksmi, her nature as subtle cosmogonic and cosmological principles, yet a third level of identification is postulated that represents her personal form as a goddess, a form that is manifest as different individual goddesses:

When the lord created the three *gunas* of *prakrti*, there sprang up Laksmi in her three forms, Sri, Bhu, and Durga. Sri was characterized by *sattva*, Bhu by *rajas*, and Durga by *tamas*. Thus say the wise.

O lord of birds, one should not recognize any difference, on account of their mutual relation, among the forms,

On this level, Laksmi is the Great Goddess of whom the three principal goddesses Bhu, Sri, and Durga are the individual manifestations and represent the three *gunas* of *prakṛti*. The supreme lord Visnu, here identified as Purusa, also assumes corresponding forms as Brahma the creator, a second form of Visnu who acts as the preserver, and Siva the destroyer, each of whom is associated with the corresponding *gunarajas* for Brahma, *sattva* for Visnu, and *tamas* for Rudra. The supreme form of Visnu enters the *gunas* and activates them, causing the evolution of the first *tattva*, *mahat*.⁹⁷ The process of creation continues when Visnu and Laksmi enter *mahat* together and disturb it, giving rise to egoity, *ahamkara*; they then enter *ahamkara* together, disturbing it as well. Visnu then evolves the *buddhindriyas* (hearing, touching, seeing, tasting, smelling) and *karmendriyas* (speaking, grasping, walking, excreting, procreating) out of *ahamkara*, and the creation of different principles and beings ensues.⁹⁸

Laksmi continues to function on the lower levels of creation as well. When Visnu goes to sleep during the period of dissolution, Laksmi serves as the bed of water on which he reclines. The waters are nothing but Laksmi herself. Although she is identified with the waters, however, Laksmi is also said to pervade them in the form of darkness (*tamas*) and to sleep on them with Hari, to whom she sings praises.

Visnu slept for a thousand years. . . . And Laksmi (was) in the form of water (*udakarupa*), (which took) the shape of a bed. . . . She also was in the form of darkness (*tamas*). There was nothing else present whatsoever. . . . In the embryo-like waters, Laksmi sang praises to Hari. In that way, assuming the forms of Laksmi and the earth, *prakṛti* slept with Hari . . . (and) praised Hari in the embryo-like waters.⁹⁹

In this text an explicit connection is made between *prakṛti* and the primordial waters, a connection that we have seen made implicitly in other contexts. *Prakṛti* takes the form of

Laksmi, who, in turn, takes the form of the cosmic waters. All three are manifestations of the feminine principle on different levels of creation.

The levels of the Goddess's identity and the corresponding stages of creation as described in the Garuda Purana can be schematized as follows:

<i>Stages of Manifestation</i>	
<i>The Goddess</i>	<i>Creation</i>
Laksmi as the female aspect of Visnu, an integral part of him	The initial impulse toward creation that is represented by the activation of Visnu's creative power (<i>virya</i>)
Laksmi as <i>prakṛti/maya</i> , the material foundation of the cosmos that is different from from Visnu	The depositing of creative power (<i>virya</i>) in <i>prakṛti</i> , which stirs up the <i>gunas</i> of <i>prakṛti</i>
Laksmi as the Great Goddess who is the source of Sri, Bhu, and Durga	The commencement of the evolution of the <i>tattvas</i> from the activated <i>gunas</i>
Laksmi as the primordial waters	Dissolution between primary creation (<i>sarga</i>) and secondary creation (<i>pratisarga</i>)

The Narada Purana (ca. 850-1000 C. E.) also explicitly features goddesses in descriptions of the mechanisms of creation and identifies them with cosmogonic principles. Unlike the account given in the Garuda Purana, however, the account given here accepts the basic metaphysical propositions of Advaita Vedanta. It incorporates the notion of *prakṛti* as the material basis of creation but places *prakṛti* at a lower level of cosmogony than the power of *maya*, which is an inherent aspect of the supreme divinity, Visnu.

At the dawn of creation, Mahavisnu alone is said to exist as Brahman. His supreme *sakti* stimulates the process of creation. This *sakti* is described as both existent and non-

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existent in nature (*bhavabhavasvarupa*), and is both knowledge (*vidya*) and ignorance (*avidya*). 100 These categories *vidya* and *avidya* are borrowed from Advaita Vedanta philosophy according to which, as we have seen, knowledge or *vidya* constitutes the understanding of Nirguna Brahman, Brahman without qualities. Ignorance or *avidya* is the absence of this true understanding. *Avidya* on the level of epistemology is correlated with *maya* on the level of ontology. In this passage of the Narada Purana, *avidya* is declared to be the false belief that the world is other than Visnu; *vidya* is the correct understanding of the unity of everything in Visnu, who is supreme Brahman. The universe only appears to be different from Visnu/Brahman because of *avidya*:

When the universe is understood to be different from Mahavisnu, then ignorance (*avidya*), the cause of suffering (*duhkha*), is attained. Oh Narada, when the conditions "knower, " "to-be-known, " and so on disappear, this comprehension of the oneness of everything is called knowledge (*vidya*). Thus the *maya* of Mahavisnu, if seen as distinct from him, is the giver of birth and rebirth (*samsara*), but if realized with the comprehension of nondifference from him, it is the destroyer of the round of birth and rebirth.101

This two-faceted *sakti*, which is also referred to as Visnu's *maya*, leads to birth and rebirth (*samsara*) only if its manifestation as *avidya* is activated. If it is realized with the awareness of its nondifference from Visnu, however, such that Visnu is seen as being the same as his *sakti/maya*, it leads to the end of the cycle of continual rebirths. Thus it has the potential to be creative or destructive, either perpetuating creation or causing its cessation.

As a creative energy, the *sakti* of Visnu is described as the source of the entire universe of mobile and immobile beings, which it also pervades, and is equated with various

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female divinities. The influence of Advaita Vedanta, which stresses the all-pervasiveness of Brahman, is again apparent:

The entire universe of mobile and immobile beings is produced from Visnu's *sakti*, from which all these things, whether they move or not, are different. . . . [J]ust as Lord Hari pervades the entire universe, so also does his *sakti*, oh sage, just as the burning capacity (*dahasakti*) resides in charcoal, pervading its own substratum. 102

The text then declares that this *sakti* of Visnu is called Uma, Laksmi, Bharati, Girija, Ambika, Durga, and so on, explicitly identifying the cosmogonic power of Brahman with diverse goddesses. The side of Visnu's potency, then, that creates and sustains the world is clearly female. This *sakti* is also described as *vidya*, *avidya*, *maya*, and supreme *prakrti*, all of which seem to be the various aspects of Visnu's *sakti*.103 The identification of the *sakti* or *maya* of Visnu with *prakrti* is made explicit once again a bit further on in the text:

His *sakti* is the great *maya*, the trustworthy upholder of the world. Because of its being the primary material cause of the universe, it is called *prakrti* by those who are knowledgeable.104

In the verses that follow, the subsumption of Samkhya categories is apparent. Visnu engages himself in the creation of the three worlds, and three forms evolve from him: time (*kala*), *purusa*, and *prakrti*. When *prakrti* is agitated, *mahat* evolves; from *mahat* evolves *buddhi*, from which *ahamkara* originates in turn. The rest of the *tattvas* then arise in succession.105 Although Visnu's *sakti* is identical with him on the highest level as *vidya*, it is also distinct from him and is evolved from him as primordial *prakrti*.

The different levels of identification of the different feminine principles associated with Visnu and the corresponding stages in creation in this section of the Narada Purana can be schematized as follows:

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Stages of Manifestation

The Feminine Principle

Sakti/maya as the inherent energy of Visnu, identified as various goddesses (Uma, Laksmi, Durga, etc.)

Prakrti as the manifestation of *sakti/maya*, distinct from Visnu

Creation

The initial impulse toward creation that is represented by the activation of Visnu's *sakti/maya* as *avidya*

The beginning of primary creation through the agitation of *prakrti* and the evolution of the *tattvas*

The third *pada* of the first part (Purva-Khanda) and the second part (Uttara-Khanda) of the Narada Purana contain materials that elevate Krsna, one of the most important incarnations of Visnu, to supreme status and identify his consort Radha with Krsna's *maya* and with *prakrti*. 106 We are told that in Goloka, Krsna's heaven, Krsna dwells eternally as supreme Brahman (Parabrahman), who is beyond attributes. On this highest level, Radha is one with Krsna. Radha abides with Krsna in the same body, and it is said that there is no difference at all between them a common Puranic formula, as previously mentioned. Krsna is like the substance of which Radha is the attribute, and they are as inseparable as milk and its color or earth and its smell.107 One passage describes this highest level of Radha's identity as beyond *prakrti*, existing in the form of consciousness (*cidrupa*).108 Just as Visnu's *sakti*, which is equated with several different goddesses, is described in the earlier portions of the text as both identical with Visnu on the highest level and distinct from him when evolved out of him at the time of creation, Radha, too, is described as both identical with Krsna on the highest level and distinct from him when she is separated from him. She is said to be produced from half of his body, and she becomes manifest as Mulaprakrti Isvari, the goddess primordial Prakrti. As such, Radha is described as being of the nature of the visible and invisible

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worlds (*drsyadrsyasvarupini*) and is called the maker of the universe (*jagatkartri*) and the mother (*sutika*) of all. 109

The highest, eternal form of Radha gives rise to five goddesses who are described as her five manifestations: Laksmi, Durga, Savitri, Sarasvati, and a second form of Radha herself. These five goddesses are called collectively the cause of creation (*srstikarana*).110 So Radha is also conceived to be the Great Goddess of whom other goddesses are lesser forms. In fact, the text asserts that she springs forth from Krsna's body and becomes the source of not only other goddesses, but also the cowherdesses who sport with Krsna. These are her partial incarnations (*amsa*) and are identified as her own individual *saktis*:

Sanatkumara said: Oh Narada, listen! I will narrate the greatly wondrous origin of the partial incarnations (*amsa*) of Radha, her *saktis*, along with the (appropriate) mantra recitation. That (goddess) whom I call Radha originates from half of Krsna's body. She is eternal, residing in Goloka together with Krsna. . . . Mahalaksmi arose from the left side of Radha . . . (and) the cowherd-maidens arose from the pores of Radha's skin.111

Although Radha is the chief female deity in this section of the Purana, Durga is also sometimes elevated to supreme status. The ascendancy of Durga is in fact asserted in this same passage. Various male divinities are described as evolving from Krsna's person and are subsequently paired with their corresponding female consorts, who emerge from the body of either Krsna or Radha. Visnu/Narayana, for example, is manifested from Krsna's left side; analogously, Laksmi, Visnu's consort, springs from Radha's left side (see above), and Krsna gives her to Narayana. Siva is created when Krsna divides himself in two, and Siva takes as his wife Durga, who is also manifested from Krsna's person.112 When she emerges from Krsna, Durga is lauded as the source of all other female divinities and as *maya/prakrti*:

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Meanwhile, oh Brahmin, Durga, the eternal *maya* of Visnu, suddenly became manifest from the body of Krsna. SheMulaprakrti Isvariwas in the form of the seed of all goddesses, perfect, having splendor as her own form, and

consisting of the three *gunas*. 113

Different passages use similar or identical epithets to describe Radha, calling her *Mulaprakṛti*, the eternal *māya* of Viṣṇu and the inherent *māya* of Kṛṣṇa. Thus the ultimate identity between the two goddesses is made implicitly.¹¹⁴ The integration of Durgā into this material is probably attributable at least in part to the influence of the *Devi-Mahatmya*. This passage makes a self-conscious attempt to model itself on the Great Goddess tradition and thus adopts not only some of the *Devi-Mahatmya*'s themes but also its Great Goddess, who is associated primarily with Śiva and is named Durgā.

Although the *Narada Purāṇa* does not explicitly link the materials pertaining to Radha and Kṛṣṇa with stages of cosmogony, the similarity between the two different accounts in this text that we have explored that of Viṣṇu's *śakti*/*Viṣṇu* and that of Radha/Kṛṣṇa suggests an underlying structural parallel between the members of each pair. In the first case, the material is integrated into an account of primary creation, but in the second case, it is not. Furthermore, the *Purāṇa* also contains a creation narrative immediately preceding the description of the ultimate unity of Radha and Kṛṣṇa that incorporates Kṛṣṇa into a *Samkhya* type description of cosmogony. Kṛṣṇa is described as the supreme lord who is present at the time of creation. He deposits his *śakti* into *prakṛti*, causing the evolution of the *gunas*, which are described as Kṛṣṇa's rays (*amsu*) or bodies. This causes the evolution of *māhāt* from the *gunas*, and the rest of creation follows.¹¹⁵ This *śakti* seems to be different from *prakṛti*, since Kṛṣṇa deposits the former in the latter, yet the two principles are also identified with one another, just as Radha is described as both the form of consciousness beyond *prakṛti* as well as *prakṛti*.

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The elevation of Kṛṣṇa and Radha to supreme status and their identities and roles in cosmogony are most elaborately depicted in the *Brahmaivaivarta Purāṇa* (ca. 1400-1600 C. E.), which also includes much Radha-Kṛṣṇa material similar to that which is in the *Narada Purāṇa*. In this *Purāṇa*, the celebration of the feminine principle in cosmogony is even stronger than in most of the others that we have seen thus far. There are several different accounts of creation in this text, all of which explicitly ascribe an active role to certain goddesses at the level of primary creation. It is notable that the cosmogonies that are found in the *Brahmaivaivarta Purāṇa* leave out the description of the evolution of the *tattvas* that we have seen in some of the other *Purāṇas* in favor of more purely mythological explanations of cosmogony.

There are several different accounts of creation in this text. According to one account, *Ātman* splits himself into two parts in the beginning of creation by the power of yoga. The right side is called *puruṣa*, and the left, *prakṛti*. The significance of *prakṛti* in the process of creation is recounted in a passage where *Narāyaṇa* explains to *Narada* the significance of the term *prakṛti* according to some rather creative etymology.

Oh child, who is fit to describe the essence of *prakṛti*? Nevertheless, I will describe it to you as I heard it from the mouth of *Dharma*. *Pra-* means distinguished (*prakṛsta*), and *-kṛti* means creation (*srsti*). Which goddess is distinguished in creation, she is called *Prakṛti*. According to scripture (*sruti*), *pra-* means the preeminent *guṇa sattuva*, *-kr-* means the middle *guṇa rajas*, and *-ti* means *tamas*. She, therefore, who has the three *gunas* as her own form is possessed of all powers (*śakti*) and is preeminent in causing creation; therefore, she is called *Prakṛti*. *Pra-* means first, and *-kṛti* means creation. And that goddess who is first in creation is therefore called *Prakṛti*. 116

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Just as Kṛṣṇa is eternal, so is *Prakṛti*, for the two are indissolubly connected. Kṛṣṇa cannot create without her, for she is also his creative power, *śakti*. In order to explain the nature of this *śakti*, the text again resorts to folk etymology. We are told that *sak-* means majesty (*aisvarya*), and *-ti* means strength (*parakrama*); hence *Śakti* is the bestower of all majesty and strength. ¹¹⁷ Although the equation of *prakṛti*/*śakti* with *māya* is found in the text, the Goddess's manifestation as *māya* is subordinated.

The relationship between Kṛṣṇa and the goddess *Prakṛti*/*Śakti* is quite complex. In his excellent and careful study of the *Brahmaivaivarta Purāṇa*, C. Mackenzie Brown differentiates among four types of relational models or analogies that are found in the text and are used to describe the relationship between Kṛṣṇa and his female counterpart: (1) substance and attribute, (2) efficient and material cause, (3) support and supported or container and contained (*adhara* and *adheya*),

and (4) "soul" (*atman*) and body.¹¹⁸ Brown argues that, as substance and attribute, Krsna and the goddess Prakrti/Sakti are described as existing together like milk and its whiteness, water and its coolness, smell in the earth, burning in fire, and so on. Such descriptions are also found in the Narada Purana, as we have seen. Brown points out that in some passages of the Brahmavaivarta Purana, Prakrti is described not just as an attribute but also as the activating energy, *sakti*, of the substance that represents Krsna and without which the substance could not properly function or function at all.¹¹⁹ As this *sakti*, Prakrti also represents the power that is needed to bring forth and make manifest the essence or the very life of the substance with which she is linked:

She (is the one) who has the form of the burning quality in fire and radiance in the sun, the lustre in the moon and in the lotuses, exceedingly beautiful; whose own form consists of all the powers (*sakti*) in Sri Krsna, the supreme Self (Paramatman), by means of whom,

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too, the Self is possessed with power (*sakti*), and the world also; and without whom the whole world, though living, remains as if dead. ¹²⁰

As efficient and material cause of creation, Krsna and Prakrti are like goldsmith and gold, or potter and clay. This model tends to emphasize the materiality of Prakrti over her nature as power, which is emphasized more in the substance-attribute metaphor. Nevertheless, Prakrti's power in relation to her mate is not forgotten, for when Krsna possesses the material with which to create, this gives him the ability to act on his creative impulses. Krsna declares:

Just as a potter with clay is always possessed of the power (*saktimat*) to make a pot, thus am I together with you, who are Prakrti, (possessed of the power) to create creation. Without you, I am inert and am always powerless. You have all powers (*sakti*) as your own form; come into my presence.¹²¹

Prakrti represents the material that Krsna then manipulates in order to bring about creation or the energy, *sakti*, which he employs in the creative process.

In passages that describe their relationship according to the third type of model, as support and supported or container and contained (*adhara* and *adheya*), Krsna and Prakrti are less rigidly cast in their roles. Whereas some passages assert that Krsna is the support of the world, which is the manifestation of Prakrti, other passages interpret Prakrti to be the support. As the womb of creation, she is that which supports and contains Krsna, who is in the form of seed and thus resides within her.¹²² As "soul" (*atman*) and body, they are inseparably united not only within the body of Krsna himself but on all levels of creation as well:

Without the body, where is the soul (*atman*)/ And where is the body without the soul? There is pre-

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eminence of both, Oh Goddess; without you now, whence the world? Nowhere is there separation of us two. . . . Where there is soul, there also is body. ¹²³

On the highest level, *prakrti* is both an impersonal principle and the Great Goddess, the Mahadevi who transcends all other female divinities and is their source. When the goddess Prakrti is *nirguna*, without qualities, she is the counterpart of Krsna's *nirguna* form. It is in fact remarkable that the Brahmavaivarta Purana identifies a level of Prakrti that is *nirguna*, since Samkhya describes *prakrti* as inherently possessed of *gunas* and is thus usually described as *triguna*, "having three *gunas*," by nature. Yet we are told:

As the power (*sakti*) of burning in fire and the radiance in the sun, oh sage, as the whiteness in milk and coldness in water, as sound in the sky and smell in the earth, thus always are Nirguna Brahman and Nirguna Prakrti.¹²⁴

The postulation of a level of Prakrti that is beyond qualities, hence beyond the three *gunas*, is probably a reflection of the fact that Prakrti is equated with the *sakti* of Krsna/ Brahman. The notion of a *sakti* inherent in Brahman does not involve any postulation of qualities whatsoever. If Brahman is in his *nirguna* state, it thus follows that his inherent *sakti* must also

be *nirguna*. Since Prakrti is here identified with Kṛṣṇa/Brahman's *śakti*, the significance of the principle is reinterpreted to conform to the new context.

As *saguna*, Prakrti is Mulaprakrti Isvari, the goddess primordial Prakrti.¹²⁵ She assumes five forms in the process of creation and becomes manifest as the goddesses Durga, Radha, Lakṣmi, Sarasvatī, and Savitrī.¹²⁶ Besides taking on different manifestations in the form of different goddesses, Prakrti is also the source of all human women, who are descended from her parts or digits.¹²⁷ Essentially, all female forms are her portions. The five different goddesses who

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spring out of Prakrti appear to be simply her partial incarnations, but in fact Radha and Durga are often identified with her. Brown has pointed out that the identification of both Radha and Durga with Prakrti indicates the essential identity of the two goddesses with one another, an identification that we have also seen made implicitly in the Narada Purāṇa. In this case, the text proposes the equation between the two explicitly.¹²⁸ The final ascendancy of either Radha or Durga as the chosen form depends on the perspective of the believer:

She who is merged into Kṛṣṇa's breast is the goddess Mulaprakrti. The wise call her Durga, the eternal Viṣṇumaya. . . . Vaiṣṇavas call her Mahalakṣmi, the supreme Radha.¹²⁹

Because of the Vaiṣṇava orientation of the Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa, it ultimately favors Radha as the supreme feminine principle and goddess. As such, Radha is both *nirguna* and *saguna*:

[Y]ou are the goddess Mulaprakrti; you are *saguna* by a digit (*kala*), but you yourself are *nirguna* alone.¹³⁰

As in the Narada Purāṇa, however, it is sometimes Durga, not Radha, who is elevated to this status. In the Brahma-Khaṇḍa, for example, Hari (Kṛṣṇa) is said to be present at the time of creation. When he decides to create, the *guṇas* emerge from his right side. The *tattvas* are then evolved from the *guṇas*. Narayana also comes out of his right side; Mahesa (Śiva) emerges from the left; and Brahma comes out of his abdomen. Various other beings also spring from Kṛṣṇa's body, including the goddess Mulaprakrti, who springs from his intellect (*buddhi*). This goddess is described as the root cause of the universe and is identified as Durga. It is through her that the world becomes possessed of power (*śaktimat*). Radha emerges quite a bit later from Kṛṣṇa's left side.¹³¹ Durga is said to be Prakrti, but she is also supreme Śakti, and it is said that at a future time she will emerge

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from the accumulated energy (*tejas*) of the gods.¹³² The influence of the Devi-Mahatmya is again apparent here.

The role of Prakrti in creation is also described in an account that Brown calls creation by copulation and that he differentiates from the division of Prakrti into the five goddesses described above, denoted by Brown as the divisional manifestation of Prakrti.¹³³ When Kṛṣṇa desires to create, he divides himself into two parts. The right side becomes the male Puruṣa, who is the second self of Kṛṣṇa, and the left becomes the female Prakrti.¹³⁴ When he sees his female counterpart, Kṛṣṇa (Puruṣa) is overtaken with lust.

The eternal one, greatly lustful and possessed by unrestrained desire, beheld her. She was exceedingly desirable (and) as beautiful as a Champaka tree. Her buttocks were like the disk of the full moon; that beautiful woman had hips that were like the stem of a very lovely plantain tree and two breasts that were shaped like beautiful coconuts. She was endowed with a voluptuous shape but was slender-waisted. She was a gorgeous woman.¹³⁵

Kṛṣṇa succumbs to his passion. The two make love, and Kṛṣṇa discharges semen into her womb. Prakrti sweats and breathes hard during the lovemaking; her perspiration becomes the cosmic waters, and her breath becomes the wind and the life-breath (*prāṇa*) of all living creatures. The semen deposited in the womb of the Goddess is fruitful and forms an egg. Distressed by the egg, she casts it into the cosmic waters. Kṛṣṇa becomes angry and curses her so that neither she nor the other celestial nymphs who are her portions will ever again produce offspring.¹³⁶

In this account, the familiar theme of the interaction of Puruṣa and Prakrti providing the initial impulse that spurs the

genesis of the cosmos is reinterpreted and clad in more colorful mythological clothing than the other accounts that we have seen. Prakrti is not only clearly female, but she is also the sexual partner of the supreme male being, who

makes love to her and impregnates her. The primordial oceans are explicitly connected to her by being identified as her bodily fluid. There is a related account in Narada Purana, Uttara-Bhaga 58. 24-38, according to which seven oceans are born from Radha's womb during the course of creation. They have divine physical bodies. When they become hungry and need to be nourished at Radha's breast, she is not to be found anywhere. In fact, she is off making love with Krsna. Crying out for their mother, the seven oceans force their way into the general area where Radha and Krsna are indulging in their amorous dalliance. One of the sons interrupts them, and Radha becomes angry. She banishes them to the earth, where they become the terrestrial oceans and seas.

The account of *pratisarga* that follows the story of creation by copulation is somewhat different from the more common accounts that are given in many of the other Puranas and does not mention Satarupa at all. The cosmic egg lies in the primordial waters for a lifetime of Brahma; after this, it hatches and splits in two. The child born from the egg is called Mahavirat. Abandoned by his parents, he lies helpless in the midst of the waters and begins to cry from hunger.

Now that egg remained in the water for a period of time equal to the lifetime of Brahma. When the time was right, all at once he split into two parts, (and) from the middle of the egg a single child as splendid as a thousand-million suns (emerged). And that child, having no shelter, abandoned by his father and mother and afflicted by hunger, immediately (began) screaming loudly. 137

Brahma is born from the abdomen of Virat, and Siva is then produced from Brahma's forehead. They both enter the waters and penetrate Virat, who immediately shrinks in size. Brahma, who appears to be the second self of Virat,

then enters the lotus that springs out of the navel of Krsna, who is sleeping in the cosmic ocean. Brahma wanders in the stalk of the lotus for many *yugas* but cannot find its limit. Understanding Krsna's greatness, Brahma then proceeds to worship him and obtains a boon, by means of which he is able to create the worlds. 138 Given the strong preoccupation with the feminine principle and different goddesses on the level of primary creation, it is notable that the Brahmapurana does not elaborate more fully on the role of the feminine in the *pratisarga*.

As Brown notes, there is a strong tendency in this Purana to elevate Prakrti to an equal status with Krsna or even to postulate her superiority to him, but as is always the case in Vaishnava and Saiva texts ultimately the goddess is subordinate to her male counterpart on the ontological level, and it is Prakrti's equality with Krsna that is called into question throughout the text, not his equality with her. Prakrti's significance lies less in her ultimate ontological status than in her dynamic role in the process of creation.139

The different levels of the Goddess and the corresponding stages of creation in the Brahmapurana can be schematized as follows:

Stages of Manifestation	
The Goddess	Creation
Radha as Krsna's inherent <i>sakti</i> , also called Nirguna Prakrti	Krsna's initial impulse to create
Radha as Saguna Prakrti, the material principle that emerges from Krsna but is distinct from him	The emergence of the <i>gunas</i> from Krsna's body or creation through copulation of Krsna (Purusa) and Prakrti
Radha/Durga as the Great Goddess Prakrti who is the source of other goddesses	The manifestation of different goddesses from the goddess Prakrti

Saiva Puranas and Saiva Sections of Cross-Sectarian Puranas

Just as various Vaisnava Puranas equate certain creative principles with the female counterpart of Visnu or his incarnations, Saiva Puranas do the same with respect to the consorts and wives of Siva. As the Brahmapurana personalizes *prakṛti* so that she becomes the goddess Prakṛti, the Saiva Puranas tend to personalize *sakti*, although *prakṛti* is also personalized. We will focus our analysis on the Saiva sections of the Kurma Purana and the Linga and Siva Puranas.

The Kurma Purana contains an account of creation on the secondary level that absorbs principles from primary creation. In this account, Brahma produces Rudra out of his mouth. At Brahma's command, Rudra splits himself into male and female forms. The male portion divides into eleven parts that become the eleven Rudras, and the female half becomes many different goddesses of variable character.¹⁴⁰ These themes are familiar from other accounts of the *pratisarga* contained in some of the Puranas examined above. Yet in this text, as in the Vayu Purana's account narrated above, it is the female half of Rudra, not Brahma, who is the focus of attention.

The female who springs from Rudra is called Isani, "female sovereign," and is described as Mahesvari, Samkari, or Sivathe female counterpart of Mahesvara or Samkara, which are epithets of Siva, or Siva himself and as the supreme goddess who creates the world. Though singular, she has different forms as different goddesses; they represent portions of her and are the *saktis* inherent in creation.¹⁴¹ In her different forms as various *saktis*, she pervades the world.

Siva is all pervading, endless, beyond the *gunas*, absolutely without parts, one but abiding in many portions, having the form of knowledge, exceedingly desirous, without any peer. . . . That one Mahesvari Sakti

(appears as) many in combination with (her various) attributes; she plays in his [Siva's] presence with an all-inclusive form. She does it all. This world is her creation . . . [S]he is the Devi, the sovereign over all, and the stimulator of all beings.¹⁴²

As the supreme Sakti, she is also identified with Visnu's *maya*, with which he deludes. As Sakti in the form of *maya*, she is also called upon to manifest the universal form (*vaisvarūpya*) of Siva. Thus she is linked with both Visnu and Siva.¹⁴³

As Siva's counterpart, this goddess Sakti is equal to him in the process of creation, and everything is said to spring from Siva and Sakti. Siva is *saktimat*, "possessed of *sakti*," and all other *saktis* and possessors of *sakti* are born of the goddess Sakti. Although Siva and Sakti are said to be equal, there appears to be some distinction between them. Whereas Siva is described as the enjoyer (*bhoktr*), Sakti is that which is enjoyed (*bhogya*). Siva is the thinker, whereas *sakti* is the thought.¹⁴⁴ The goddess associated with Siva is said to have a status that is more or less equal to his, yet this is not quite the case. Here again, the supreme Goddess is ultimately subordinate to the god with whom she is associated.

On the level of primary creation, Sakti is higher than *prakṛti* and is described as the source of both *prakṛti/ pradhana* and *purusa*. The text asserts that in proximity to Siva, Sakti, who is called Maya in this passage, splits herself and becomes *pradhana* and *purusa*.¹⁴⁵ As Siva's *sakti*, she is beyond *pradhana/prakṛti*, yet she becomes *prakṛti* at the beginning of creation, and it is said that Siva produces the entire world, beginning with *pradhana* (= *prakṛti*), depending on her.¹⁴⁶ In other words, as *sakti* she is the presupposition of creation, that upon which creation depends. Although the text does not incorporate the evolution of the *tattvas* into this discussion of creation, we are told that Sakti is the source of not only *pradhana* and *purusa* but also *mahat*, as well as various other creations.¹⁴⁷

The Goddess's role in cosmogony is the same as in the other Puranas that we have explored. As Prakṛti represents the agency through which Kṛṣṇa creates in the Brahmapurana, for example, Sakti in this context is the means

through which Siva creates. The different levels of the Goddess and the corresponding stages of creation in this part of the Kurma Purana can be schematized as follows:

Stages of Manifestation

The Goddess	Creation
Siva/Sakti as Siva's inherent energy (<i>sakti</i>), also called <i>maya</i>	The presupposition of creation
Sakti as <i>prakrti/pradhana</i>	The dawn of manifest creation

The cosmogony of the Linga Purana, which is also Saiva in orientation, has many similar themes but emphasizes the identity of the feminine principle as *prakrti* rather than *sakti*, thus stressing materiality over creative power. Siva, who is devoid of any mark or characteristic (*alinga*), is described as the root of manifest *pradhana* or *prakrti*, which is characterized (*linga*).

The noncharacterized (*alinga*) is the root of the characterized (*linga*). That which is characterized is called the unmanifest (*avyakta*, =*prakrti*). The noncharacterized is called Siva, and the characterized is said to be related to Siva (Saiva). They call that which is characterized *prakrti* and *pradhana*; but the highest entity, the noncharacterized which is without attributes, unchanging, undecaying, free from smell, color, and taste, (and) devoid of sound, touch, and so forth is named Siva. 148

Prakrti originates from the body of the *alinga* Siva of its own accord (*svayam*). The agency by means of which Siva produces *prakrti* is designated as *maya*. *Maya* is the power by

which the noncharacterized (Siva) becomes characterized (*prakrti*), but *maya* is not explicitly identified with *prakrti*. It is said that *prakrti* is originally unmanifest, but when gazed at by Siva, it becomes possessed of the *gunas*. This latter form of *prakrti* is called Saivi, "the female form pertaining to Siva. " 149

Saivi Prakrti is the source of the cosmos. She is called the unborn (*aja*), unique mother of the universe consisting of red, white, and black colors, the three colors of the *gunas* of *prakrti* a description that clearly refers to that of the unborn (*aja*) red, white, and black female found in Svetasvatara Upanisad 4. 5. At the time of creation, it is said that *mahat* is evolved out of the *gunas* of *prakrti* at Purusa's command. *Mahat* enters the unmanifest form of *prakrti*; the triple *ahamnkra* evolves out of *mahat*, and the evolution of the rest of the *tattvas* ensues. The *tattvas* then give rise to a cosmic egg.150

As Saivi, Prakrti is the female counterpart of Siva. She is his feminine side, and it is she who gives rise to creation. She is also the Great Goddess, Mahadevi, who is the source of all goddesses and who has many forms. As the Mahadevi, she is also known as Uma, Siva, and so on. Siva explains the nature of the goddess Prakrti, repeating again the theme of the unborn (*aja*) tricolored female:

O Lord Brahma, the Great Goddess (Mahesvari) Prakrti, your source/mother (*prasuti*), and that of Visnu and the other gods, has been apportioned out. . . . Those knowing the truth call her by various names: the one possessing four-faces, the origin/womb (*yoni*) of the universe, primordial cow, the foundation, Gauri, Maya, Vidya, Krsna, Haimavati, Pradhana, or Prakrti. (They call her) unborn (*aja*), singular, red, white, and black, creating all beings as having the same form as her.151

Although she appears to be subordinate to Siva, since he creates her, the text asserts that ultimately there is no

difference between them. 152 Once again, however, the alleged equality between the two appears to be somewhat equivocal, for it is the Goddess's status in relation to Siva that is called into question and not his status in relation to her.

As in the section of the Kurma Purana discussed above, the account of secondary creation in this text identifies the

female half of Rudra as this Great Goddess. At the beginning of creation, Brahma creates Rudra with a body that is half male and half female. He commands Rudra to divide himself, which Rudra does. The female portion becomes the mother of the universe and the source of all women in the three worlds.¹⁵³ A different account of secondary creation repeats the same general theme. Upset with his self-generated creation, which is not bearing progeny, Brahma becomes angry. Rudra springs forth from Brahma's mouth in a form that is half male, half female. The female half becomes Uma; she in turn makes other goddesses and human women. Siva calls her unborn (*aja*) Maya.¹⁵⁴ The term "unborn" (*aja*) used in relation to a goddess thus appears once again. Prakrti is also called *aja*, indicating that Uma, who is Maya, is also identified with Prakrti, since all three are given this same epithet. Yet another account asserts that the Great Goddess sharing half of Siva's body divides into two portions, white and black. From both parts, thousands of goddesses are born and pervade all of creation.¹⁵⁵

The different levels of the Goddess and the corresponding stages of creation in the Linga Purana can be schematized as follows:

<i>Stages of Manifestation</i>	
<i>The Goddess</i>	<i>Creation</i>
Saivi Prakrti as unmanifest <i>prakrti</i> , inherent within the body of Siva	The presupposition of creation

The manifestation of Prakrti by means of <i>maya</i> or by means of Siva's glance	Evolution of <i>mahat</i> out of the <i>gunas</i> of <i>prakrti</i> and the entrance of <i>mahat</i> into un-manifest <i>prakrti</i>
Prakrti/Siva/Uma as the Great Goddess who is the source of all other goddesses	Manifestation of different goddesses from the goddess Prakrti

Many of the cosmogonic themes found in the Linga Purana are also found in the Siva Purana (ca. 800-1000 C. E.), though in a slightly different form. In this Purana's account, Nirguna Brahman alone exists at the beginning of creation and is described as incomprehensible to the mind and beyond description. The text emphasizes the unfathomable nature of Brahman by using negative language reminiscent of that used in the Upanisads to describe Brahman as "not this . . . not that" (*neti . . . neti*). Having no form, it is said that Brahman wishes to create one and therefore produces a form with qualities (*saguna*) called Isvara or Sadasiva, which is Brahman's second self. These categories are obviously borrowed from Vedanta. When Isvara is created, Parabrahman becomes veiled (*antar dha*). ¹⁵⁶

Without affecting his body in any way, Isvara/Sadasiva emits the goddess Sakti from himself. Sakti is called by many names, including Pradhana, Prakrti, and Maya. She is the goddess of all (Sakalesvari), the prime cause (*mulakarana*), the generator of everything. Together, the two create the realm of Siva, Sivaloka. Siva then creates Visnu, who undertakes austerities. Water currents begin to flow from the body of Visnu. It is said that this flowing forth of water is the result of Siva's *maya*, although the precise nature of the effect of *maya* on Visnu is not explained. Brahman (Siva) in the form of the waters then pervades the entire void. Meanwhile, the *tattvas* are evolved from *sakti/ prakrti*, and Visnu goes to sleep in the waters of Brahman.¹⁵⁷ There is another account of the manifestation of Sakti that

adopts the Madhu-Kaitabha story of the manifestation of the Goddess from the Devi-Mahatmya. When the world is under water during the dissolution, two *asuras*, Madhu and Kaitabha, are born of the dirt in the ear of Visnu. Seeing Brahma seated on his lotus, they attempt to kill him. Brahma, afraid, invokes the Goddess. He calls her by several names and lauds her as the mother of the three deities (Brahma, Visnu, and Siva), the protectress of the gods, the *maya* of Visnu, and so forth. The goddess then manifests herself as Mahakali. ¹⁵⁸

Sakti is Siva, the female side of Siva. One passage asserts that although Sakti appears to be born from Siva in his form as Sadasiva, she is not really born but is simply manifested from him. In truth, it is said, she is part of Siva and is as eternal and all-pervasive as he is:

Hara, the most excellent lord, sent forth a goddess from a portion of his body. Those who are knowledgeable about Brahman say that this goddess, who is endowed with divine attributes, is the highest *sakti* of that supreme Siva, the highest Self. Bhavani (= Siva) is that goddess who manifested from the body of Siva and in whom there is found no birth, death, old age, and so forth. . . . She is the Goddess who, pervading this whole world with her might, stands (in it). That goddess wondrously appeared as if she were embodied. And she deludes this whole world with *maya*. Although (it appears that) she was born from the lord (Isvara, = Siva), in reality she is not born.¹⁵⁹

This Sakti is the source of the manifest cosmos and has several forms. In this text, usually the primary consort of SivaUma or Durgais identified as Prakrti or Sakti, and other goddesses are seen as being her manifestations. In one passage, for example, the goddess Uma, who is called the Great Goddess (Paramesvari), is identified as Prakrti.

She is the source of Vac, Laksmi, and Kali, the wives of Brahma, Visnu, and another wife of Siva himself. These three are her *saktis*.¹⁶⁰ Sakti is reborn as Sati and Parvati,¹⁶¹ and these two goddesses are also lauded as primordial Prakrti or Sakti. In one passage, for example, Sati, like Uma, is called Paramesvari and is identified as primordial Sakti; elsewhere, Parvati is lauded as the Mahadevi, the primordial Sakti who is Siva.¹⁶²

One account of secondary creation identifies Satarupa as an embodiment of Sakti.¹⁶³ Brahma, frustrated by the inability of his mind-born progeny to further his creation, appeals to the Goddess. Complaining that the sons he has created thus far are not fruitful, he wishes to increase the population through sexual reproduction. He has a problem, however, for women have not yet been created. Sakti must create them, for Brahma seems unable to do so. Women are *saktis*, and as such are portions of Sakti. Brahma remarks:

The imperishable race of women has not yet gone forth from you. Thus, I have no power (*sakti*) to create the race of women. Indeed, the origin of all *saktis* is from you. Therefore, I pray to you (who are) bestowing all the *saktis* of everyone everywhere, granting wishes, Maya, the goddess of the gods (Suresvari) .¹⁶⁴

To solve the problem, Sakti creates a form of herself that she gives to Brahma. Having secured her, Brahma divides himself in half; one part becomes male, and the other part becomes the female Satarupa.¹⁶⁵ Although Satarupa is not explicitly identified with the female form given to Brahma by Sakti, this is implied.

The different levels of the Goddess and the corresponding stages of creation in the Siva Purana can be schematized as follows:

Stages of Manifestation	
The Goddess	Creation
Sakti as the inherent energy (<i>sakti</i>) of Siva	The presupposition of creation
Sakti as Prakrti/Pradhana/Maya, manifested from the body of Siva	The separation of Sakti from the body of Isvara/Sadasiva at the dawn of creation
Sakti/Uma, etc. as the Great Goddess who is the source of other goddesses	Manifestation of different goddesses from the Goddess
Sakti as Satarupa	Secondary creation (<i>pratisarga</i>)

Sakta Puranas

The Vaisnava and the Saiva Puranas that we have explored thus far incorporate the feminine principle into the

mechanisms of creation by identifying a creative principle, either *prakṛti*, *māya*, or *śakti*, with a goddess who is conceived to be the Great Goddess. Although the Goddess is supreme as a goddess, however, she is nevertheless subordinate to the god, either Viṣṇu/Kṛṣṇa or Śiva, who is extolled as the highest divinity and who is identified as Brahman. In the Sakta Puranas and Sakta sections of other Puranas, the Goddess herself is the highest divinity and is the source of all other gods, including Viṣṇu and Śiva. The Goddess therefore takes the place held by Viṣṇu in the Vaiṣṇava Puranas and Śiva in the Śaiva Puranas. Nevertheless, as in the other texts that we have explored above, she is still called Prakṛti, Māya, or Śakti, and she is described as the source of all manifest forms, whether male or female. Thus her essential nature as the cause of creation does not change, although she is conceived to be greater than any other divinity. We will focus our analysis on the Devi-Bhagavata Purana, one of the most celebrated of the Sakta Puranas. 166

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The Devi-Bhagavata Purana follows in the tradition of the Devi-Mahatmya in identifying the Goddess as the ultimate overlord of creation. She is described as the highest, primordial (*adya*) Śakti, the mother of all the worlds, eternal and omnipresent, the ultimate support of all that exists. 167 The Goddess is both *nirguṇa* and *saḡuṇa*, and the text makes a distinction between these two aspects of the Goddess. 168 In her *nirguṇa* state, she has a form that is beyond the three *guṇas*; she is supreme reality itself and transcends all qualities. When her *nirguṇa* aspect is emphasized in the text, she is frequently called Nirguṇa Śakti or Mahamāya, but, as in the Brahmavaivarta Purana, the epithet Nirguṇa Prakṛti is also used to describe this level of her being. 169 Whereas descriptions of her *nirguṇa* form tend to delineate Śakti and Mahamāya as something that the Great Goddess is, descriptions of her *saḡuṇa* form tend to use the terms *Śakti* and *māya* to denote something that she possesses.

The Goddess also has a *saḡuṇa* form, and in this state she is often depicted as a great cosmic queen. She is described as sitting on a throne composed of Brahma, Viṣṇu, and Śiva in their various forms, thus emphasizing her superiority over the male gods. 170 She dwells in Manidvīpa, "the island of gems," which is her supreme abode. Her form is overwhelming, even to the gods. One passage describes Brahma's impression of the Goddess when he, Viṣṇu, and Śiva are transported up to Manidvīpa in the Goddess's celestial chariot. They see first a couch with a jeweled carpet spread over it. Then they catch sight of the figure seated on the couch:

A beautiful woman was seated on that most excellent of couches, wearing a red garland and red clothes, anointed with red sandalwood paste, red-eyed, having a beautiful face, red-lipped, glorious, equal in splendor to ten millions of lightning flashes and ten millions of beautiful women. . . . Such a one had never been seen before. 171

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The Goddess assumes her *saḡuṇa* form when she engages in creation. As in the Devi-Mahatmya, the Goddess plays three cosmogonic roles. On one level, she is the efficient cause of creation, the willful agent who catalyzes the whole cosmogonic process. The epithets Śakti and Mahamāya are often used to denote her in her role as the active creator of the universe. Yet she is also the material basis of creation, *prakṛti* or *mulaprakṛti*. And, finally, she is embodied as creation itself.

When the Goddess wishes to create the cosmos, she does so without effort or desire. Although she is the cause of creation, she herself remains unchanged (*nirīha*). 172 It is said that with one portion she remains Nirguṇa Śakti, but she also becomes three *śaktis* that are involved in creation: sattvic *śakti*, rajasic *śakti*, and tamasic *śakti*. The names of these three creative powers reveal the influence of Samkhya categories, for they are named after the three *guṇas* of *prakṛti*. The Goddess transforms herself into these three forms when she desires to create. Her sattvic aspect becomes Mahalakṣmī, that is, Lakṣmī in a universal form. Her rajasic aspect becomes Sarasvatī, and her tamasic aspect becomes Mahakālī:

Śiva is beyond attributes (*nirguṇa*), eternal, constant, allpervading, unchanging. She is the support of all that must be realized by means of yoga, and she abides as the fourth state of consciousness (*turiya*). Her sattvic, rajasic, and tamasic *śaktis* are the three female forms Mahalakṣmī, Sarasvatī, and Mahakālī. 173

Because these goddesses are manifestations of the Goddess herself, the relationship between them and their spouses Brahma, Viṣṇu, and Śiva is the opposite of that which we have seen in the Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva Puranas, for the goddesses function at a higher level than their husbands. The superior status of the Goddess over the three male divinities

is again affirmed when it is said that the assuming of female

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form by these three *saktis* for purposes of creation is deemed *sarga*, primary creation, whereas the further resolution of them into the male deities Brahma, Visnu, and Siva is called *pratisarga*, secondary creation. Thus the three gods are subordinated to their female counterparts. 174 In another passage, the creative supremacy of the Goddess over other gods is asserted in a somewhat different manner. The text states that although those who are knowledgeable in the tradition say that Brahma is the creator of the universe, they also say that he is born from the navel-lotus of Visnu. Thus, it appears that Brahma cannot create independently and so cannot be the true creator. Again, Visnu, from whose navel Brahma is born, lies asleep on his serpent, Sesa, during the period of dissolution. Therefore, he cannot be the creator of the universe. Sesa, too, lies on the waters. As liquid cannot rest without a vessel, there must be some support that is sustaining the waters. This support is identified as the Goddess herself. 175

A different account of the mechanisms of creation draws more upon the basic conceptual framework of Advaita Vedanta but subsumes Samkhya categories as well. It is said that before the universe is created, only the Goddess exists as supreme Brahman (Parabrahman). As such, she is beyond all qualities (*nirguna*). She is incomprehensible, undefinable, and unparalleled, and she possesses a single inherent power (*sakti*) called *maya*. The *maya* of the Goddess is also beyond qualification: it is neither existent, nor nonexistent, nor both:

The Goddess said: . . . Formerly, I alone existed. There was nothing else whatsoever At that time, my own form was named intellect (*cit*), consciousness (*samvid*), and supreme Brahman. I am incomprehensible, undefinable, unparalleled. . . . My perfect (*siddha*) *sakti* is known as *maya*. It is neither existent, nor nonexistent, nor both, nor self-contradictory. This indefinable entity always exists. 176

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United with her power (*sakti*) of *maya*, Devi acts as the source of creation. 177 There are two types of *maya* that are described as different kinds of causes and play different roles in cosmogony. It is said that when the Goddess's *maya* is united with intelligence (*caitanya*), it acts as the instrumental or efficient cause (*nimitta*) in creation, but when it transforms into the manifest world, it is the material cause (*samavaya*). 178 It appears to be the Goddess's inherent *maya*, not the Goddess herself, who is both the efficient and the material cause of creation, but the Goddess is said to be ultimately identical with her *maya*, for on the highest level of reality there is no difference between them. 179 Another passage also enumerates two levels of *maya*, one of which is described as purely sattvic and the other of which is described as mixed with the *gunas* and is equated with *avidya*. *Maya* is identified here with *prakrti*. 180 Elsewhere, the two aspects of the Goddess's *maya* are described as "inward facing" (*antarmukha*) and "outward facing" (*bahirmukha*). 181 In all cases, the latter form of *maya* takes on the role of *prakrti* as the material source of the world.

As Prakrti, the Goddess is the material ground of the manifest cosmos, and she is described as the root of the tree of creation and the cause of all that exists. 182 As primordial cause, she contains the effect, creation itself, latent within her. After she creates the cosmos, it is said that she then enters into it or assumes its form. 183 Thus the universe is simply a transformation of the Goddess herself. This equation of the Goddess with the manifest universe is dramatically illustrated in a passage in which diverse parts of the cosmos are equated with different parts of her body. The sun and moon are equated with her eyes and the quarters with her ears. The universe is said to be her heart, the earth her loins, and the midregions her navel. Different gods and portions of the worlds are also equated with her different body parts. 184

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While conceding to the ultimate identity of all forms of the Goddess, the Devi-Bhagavata Purana nevertheless asserts a hierarchical relationship among her different aspects. As Nirguna Brahman, she is essentially primordial or Nirguna Sakti, Mahamaya, or Nirguna Prakrti, beyond attributes, beyond the *gunas*, and without any qualification whatsoever. As Saguna Brahman, she is said to be endowed with the *sakti* of *maya*, a creative power that participates in both her

transcendent and immanent forms. As the principle of *prakṛti*, finally, she both activates and is identified with the creative *māya* with which she is endowed.

The different levels of the Goddess and the corresponding stages of creation in the Devi-Bhagavata Purana can be schematized as follows:

<i>Stages of Manifestation</i>	
<i>The Goddess</i>	<i>Creation</i>
The Goddess as Parabrahman, Primordial or Nirguna Sakti, Mahamaya, or Nirguna Prakṛti	Beyond creation
The Goddess as Saguna Brahman, the possessor of creative powers (<i>śaktis</i>) that she activates or the possessor of a single inherent creative power called <i>māya</i>	The initial impulse toward creation that is represented by the activation of the Goddess's creative <i>śaktis</i>
The Goddess as Prakṛti or <i>avidyā/bāhirmukha māya</i>	The beginning of the differentiation of creation

In the Puranas, many of the disparate elements that we have explored in the previous two chapters pertaining to the identity of the Great Goddess and her nature as *śakti*, *māya*, and *prakṛti* are woven together in elaborate but fairly consistent ways in the context of cosmogonic narratives.

Vedic themes and structures are joined with others that are derived from speculative and philosophical discourse, and a new narrative emerges. The marriage of mythological and philosophical motifs provides a context for pairing divinities with principles, and a Great Goddess is born.

Chapter Four
Concluding Remarks

Resume

Before moving on to assess the implications of the observations made in the preceding pages, first it might be helpful to review and summarize the essential points that have been made. This is perhaps most effectively done in terms of four different types of questions that have been asked and the answers to them that we have found. These questions address four different types of issues with respect to the rise of the Great Goddess in Brahmanical Hinduism: contextual, thematic, historical, and interpretive.

- *Contextual*: In what context is the theology of the Great Goddess formulated? What are the mechanisms by means of which she is formulated?
- *Thematic*: What makes the Great Goddess "Great"? Why is she *the* Goddess and not just *a* goddess?
- *Historical*: Where do the conceptual formulations associated with the Goddess come from, and how does this whole symbolic complex come about?
- *Interpretive*: Why is the Goddess formulated in the specific ways in which she is formulated?

Contextual Issues

Within Brahmanical Hinduism, the essential identity of the Great Goddess is expounded in the Puranas, mythological works dating from about the third century C. E.-ca. the sixteenth century C. E. More specifically, the Goddess is integrated into the accounts of creation found in several of the Puranas and is often described as an essential cog in the cosmogonic wheel. Although the Puranas are a heterogeneous mix of many elements, they all contain accounts of primary and secondary creation (*sarga* and *pratisarga*) that participate in the same essential cosmogonic patterns.

Thematic Issues

The Goddess is *the* Goddess, not just *a* goddess, because of certain kinds of equations that are made in the Puranic myths of creation. The Goddess is identified with cosmogonic principles that are unique and transcend the particular identity of individual divinities. Since she is equated with such principles, the Goddess is also seen as transcending any particular identity.

Three patterns appear throughout the Puranas. (1) The Goddess is described as the active dimension of Nirguna Brahman or the power inherent within Brahman that is responsible for creation itself. She is the creative impulse that sets in motion the mechanisms of the cosmogonic process and then sustains the universe once it has been created. In this capacity, she is called *sakti*. (2) The Goddess is also the principle of materiality that is the basis of the phenomenal-empirical world, the ground of all things. As such, she is called *prakrti*. (3) Finally, the Goddess is identified as *maya*, which lies between *sakti* and *prakrti*. When *maya* denotes the creative or delusive power by means of which creation is effected, it is identified or allied with *sakti*. When the term *maya* is used to indicate the material principle of creation, it is identified or allied

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with *prakrti*. In all cases, when the Goddess is identified with these principles, she plays both a cosmogonic and a cosmological role.

As a cosmogonic agent, the Goddess as *sakti*, *prakrti*, and/or *maya* is the immediate source of the created universe. In this capacity she is identified as an impersonal principle active in primary creation, that is, in the creation of the various categories that form the foundation of the manifest world. In Vaisnava and Saiva contexts where either Visnu or Siva is identified as Brahman, she plays a creative role on two different levels.

On the highest level, the Goddess is the inherent creative power or *sakti* of the Absolute. She exists within Nirguna Brahman as his inseparable dimension or aspect. As *sakti*, she is the impelling cause of creation, the impulse that sets the cosmogonic process in motion. Thus, for example, in the Kurma Purana Visnu describes Laksmi, his supreme (*parama*) *sakti*, as consisting of or absorbed in himself, and the siva Purana asserts that Sadasiva creates Sakti by manifesting her from himself. When this level of the Goddess is also identified with the principle *maya*, it is generally construed as encompassing both the creative and delusive capacities possessed by Brahman. This level of the Goddess's identity corresponds to the initial stage of cosmogony in which the first impulse toward creation arises within the Absolute.

On a lower level, once the Goddess is separated out from Nirguna Brahman and becomes an independent entity, she is identified as the material principle of creation, *prakrti*. As such, she is the immediate source of the manifest cosmos. When this level of the Goddess is identified with *maya*, it is generally construed as a material principle distinct from Brahman in which the drama of continual birth and rebirth (*samsara*) unfolds. This level of the Goddess's identity corresponds to the activation of the creative impulse inherent within the Absolute and the commencement of the mechanisms of cosmogony.

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The roles of the Goddess in the Puranas as both *sakti/maya* and *maya/prakrti* are structured according to patterns that can be traced back to Vedic literature. The double function of the Goddess in Puranic accounts of primary creation

parallels the roles of various Vedic goddesses as both the impelling and the material causes of creation. In the Vedic texts these two levels of the feminine principle are most clearly combined in accounts of the creative role of the goddess Vac found in the Brahmanas. On one level, Vac exists as an inherent aspect of Prajapati, the creator. When she is separated from him and sent forth, she becomes the material foundation of creation, usually identified as the cosmic waters. These two aspects of Vac's identity correspond to those of the Goddess.

In the Vaisnava and Saiva Puranas, the two levels of the Goddess and the stages of primary creation (*sarga*) to which they correspond can be generally schematized as follows:

<i>Stages of Manifestation</i>	
<i>The Goddess</i>	<i>Creation</i>
The Goddess (Laksmi, Radha, Sakti, etc.)	The initial impulse toward creation that is
as the inherent energy (<i>sakti</i> or <i>maya</i>) of Brahman	represented by the activation of the <i>sakti</i> inherent within Brahman
The Goddess as the material foundation of the cosmos(<i>prakrti</i> or <i>maya</i>) that is distinct from Brahman	The beginning of the creative process

Sakta texts such as the Devi-Bhagavata Purana postulate a third level of the Goddess that lies beyond either of these two levels. Since the Goddess herself is identified as Nirguna Brahman, she is equated with the Absolute, in which capacity she is called Sakti, Nirguna Sakti, primordial (*adya*) Sakti, Mahamaya, Nirguna Prakrti, and so forth. As Nirguna Brahman, the Goddess is the eternal, unchanging Absolute.

This level of the Goddess's identity transcends the other two levels that we find in Vaisnava and Saiva contexts. Second, the Goddess is also described as the possessor of creative powers or *saktis* by means of which she creates the universe. Finally, she is also identified as *prakrti*. These latter two stages correspond to the stages of creation described above. The levels of the Goddess in the Devi-Bhagavata Purana and the stages of primary creation with which they are correlated can therefore be schematized as follows:

<i>Stages of Manifestation</i>	
<i>The Goddess</i>	<i>Creation</i>
The Goddess as Primordial or Nirguna Sakti, Maya, or Prakrti	Beyond creation and the process of cosmogony
The Goddess as the possessor of creative powers (<i>sakti</i> or <i>maya</i>) that she activates	The initial impulse toward creation that is represented by the activation of the <i>sakti</i> inherent within the Goddess
The Goddess as the material foundation of the cosmos(<i>prakrti</i> or <i>maya</i>)	The beginning of the creative process

This depiction of the Goddess is in fact far less common in the Puranas as a whole than the portrayal of her as subordinate to Visnu or Siva.

In secondary creation, that is, in the formation and differentiation of the manifest cosmos, the function of the Goddess as *prakrti* is embodied first in the function of the cosmic waters during the creation or re-creation of the worlds, and second in the function of Satarupa during the creation of progeny. The Vedic theme of the cosmic waters as material matrix of creation is adopted by the Puranic cosmogonies, although in a post-Vedic context the waters are rarely identified explicitly with the Goddess. One notable exception to this rule is the Garuda Purana, which

counts the waters as a manifestation of Laksmi. Satarupa represents the same principle on a more differentiated level. As *prakṛti* functions as the material principle on the level of primary creation and the waters function as the material matrix of creation during the differentiation of the worlds, Satarupa functions as the source of individual progeny.

Historical Issues

Sakti, *maya*, and *prakṛti* are important creative principles in pre-Puranic speculative and philosophical Brahmanical literature, as explored in the second chapter of this study. Yet in these earlier contexts, they are often not associated with any goddess, nor are they feminine principles, although they are grammatically feminine terms. So how does this equation of *sakti*, *maya*, and *prakṛti* with the Goddess come about?

The formation of this symbolic complex reflects a larger pattern concerning Puranic cosmogony. As we have seen, the Puranas tend to adopt theories of creation or cosmogonic themes that are already current in the Brahmanical tradition and incorporate other elements into these already existing structures such that the older creation motifs are recast and woven together to suit the particular perspective of the Puranas. Thus, for example, the cosmogonic mechanism postulated in Samkhya whereby creation is viewed as arising from the evolution of *prakṛti* is adopted by many of the Puranas but given a theistic cast. Similarly, the notion of creation as activated by the inherent power or *sakti* of the Absolute is also absorbed but reinterpreted and reworked. In this way, older Brahmanical structures are retained but then modified to suit the concerns of newer scriptural environments. As part of this process, the Brahmanical tradition subsumes what appears to be a primarily non-Brahmanical tendency to elevate female divinities to supreme status by equating certain unique principlessakti, *maya*, and *prakṛti* which are already present in the earlier

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layers of the Brahmanical tradition with the goddesses appropriate to the perspective of the given text. Thus, although the impulse to elevate the feminine principle may be largely non-Brahmanical, the means by which it is elevated are borrowed directly from Brahmanical orthodoxy.

Interpretive Issues

Why is the Goddess consistently identified in many of the Puranas as *sakti/maya/prakṛti*? Why this particular configuration? Such a question is particularly interesting in light of the fact that many of the other great Asian traditions including the Buddhist tradition, which originated in India see the feminine as the material principle but generally ascribe it a passive, not an active, role in creation.

As we have seen in the first and second chapters, the support for this particular complex comes from cosmogonic themes found not only in philosophical and epic materials but even in the Vedas. Many myths or mythic motifs found in the Vedas identify the impelling cause of creation as feminine. Thus, for example, Viraj, Vac, and Saci/Indrani are described in the Vedic literature as the energizing principle that sets the processes of creation into motion. Other passages associate different goddesses primarily the goddess earth (Prthivi), the waters (*ap*), and Aditi with materiality. Although no Great Goddess is postulated in these texts, different goddesses are depicted as playing an active creative role. Thus, the support for identifying the impelling and material causes of creation with a goddess can be found in the mythology of the Vedas.

The Upanisads and philosophical schools systematically articulate theories that identify various principles as impelling or material causes of creation. These principles are depicted as impersonal, although their roles parallel those of the various goddesses postulated in Vedic cosmogonies. In the Puranas, these different themes and theories of creation are then blended together. The confluence of these streams

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of thought with other non-Brahmanical streams results in the postulation of personalized goddess-principles that are portrayed as (a) the power that provides the initial cosmogonic impulse and sustains the universe once it has been created; and (b) the material foundation of creation.

Perhaps one explanation for why this particular combination is not found as clearly or prevalently in some of the other

Asian traditions such as Buddhism, which rejects the Vedas, is that there is little or no inherent mythological, conceptual, scriptural, and/or ideological support for such a complex of associations. In Brahmanical Hinduism, on the other hand, the seeds of the active/material depiction of the feminine principle are firmly planted in the earliest layers of the tradition and are nurtured by later developments.

Further Implications of the Study: Historical and Socio-Political Implications

In light of the results that we have found, it would be useful to examine a bit more closely some of the implications of this study. We will explore what the continuities and discontinuities with respect to the formulation of the portrayal of the Goddess might tell us about the tangible historical and socio-political factors that may have participated in the creation of her theology.

During the postclassical and medieval periods in India, the Brahmanical tradition was increasingly challenged by non-Brahmanical trends that called into question the validity of the core "orthodox" tradition. The greatest challenge came from the increasing attention placed on devotion to various divinities that were not part of the Vedic-Brahmanical tradition. The rise of *bhakti* as an expression of spirituality and the related rise and spread of non-Brahmanical devotional movements offered an alternative to the hierarchical, caste-conscious religiosity of the Brahmin priests and provided a vehicle for the expression of more

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popular religious values. In the face of such challenges, the Brahmanical tradition absorbed and accommodated elements of non-Brahmanical religiosity in order to escape becoming completely irrelevant.

As has been noted by numerous scholars, those elements that were absorbed by the Brahmanical tradition in post-Vedic times include the celebration of various non-Vedic goddesses. But it is noteworthy that despite the appearance of new non-Vedic female divinities in post-Vedic literature, nevertheless, as we have noted in this study, they are subsumed to some extent under Vedic-Brahmanical structures, some of which can be traced back to even the earliest layer of Vedic literature, the Samhitas. Hence, there is a certain amount of structural continuity within the Brahmanical tradition, although there is discontinuity on the level of specific narrative elements and emphases. The theology of the Goddess is constructed in such a way that it accommodates non-Brahmanical devotional impulses while maintaining and upholding the religious authority of the Brahmanical tradition. It does this by retaining "orthodox" ideas and structures yet reconceptualizing them vis-a-vis more popular tendencies. The Brahmanical tradition thus is able to maintain its authority and, at the same time, to strengthen its appeal.

It is most likely the case, therefore, that there was no recognition of the Great Goddess until she was constructed through the Brahmanical system's accommodation of non-Brahmanical impulses. The notion of a single Great Goddess hinges at least in part on the identification of a female divinity with unique, cosmic principles *sakti*, *maya*, and *prakṛti* which, as we have seen, are borrowed from philosophy. The systematic articulation of these principles arises first within the context of the orthodox philosophical schools, which are the domain of Brahmin priests educated in the Brahmanical Sanskrit tradition, and which then provide the conceptual frameworks that make a Great God-

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ness possible. What we see in the construction of the theology of the Goddess is a kind of continual reworking of different narrative elements and structures in a network of themes and variations. The themes are generally orthodox; the variations are, at least to some extent, shaped by influences coming in from outside the orthodox tradition. The impulse to revere goddesses highly, then, which appears to be more part of the non-Brahmanical traditions of India than of Brahmanical orthodoxy, is absorbed into Brahmanical structures so that tensions between the orthodox system and nonorthodox systems are mitigated.

Further Implications of the Study: Cultural Implications

The Relationship between Goddesses and Women

Before concluding, it would be fruitful to turn from textual analysis to cultural analysis and to explore some of the possible implications of the theology of the Goddess on the social level. In other words, how might the conception of the Great Goddess as *sakti/maya/prakrti* translate on the human level into certain Hindu attitudes toward women?

In asking such a question, one must first evaluate the extent to which a formulation such as the one explored in this study may reflect or be reflected in social practice. Much contemporary scholarship has called into question the importance of texts and textual formulations in the values, beliefs, and experiences of most human beings. With respect to the Hindu tradition, it must be said that the vast majority of Indians past and present, Hindu or not, have no knowledge of Sanskrit and have never read a single word of the Brahmanical canon. While acknowledging the tenuous relationship between literature and life, however, it is important to note that the types of texts in which we find formulations of the Great Goddess are not just mere texts but scriptures of the Brahmanical tradition. They thus carry

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a great deal of authority. Furthermore, the concepts surrounding the Great Goddess that we have explored in this study are not just scriptural but also cultural. Brahmanical values and formulations including those pertaining to the feminine represent a strong current in the cultural stream of contemporary Hindu India. The recognition of a Great Goddess and her identity as *sakti/prakrti/maya* are found throughout India even today and are integrated into the spiritual lives of Hindus on many levels of Indian society. Related perceptions of female gender are also integrated, often unconsciously, into people's awareness.

Another objection could also be raised, namely, that it is not at all clear that a strong Goddess tradition such as the one that we find in India has anything at all to do with real gender relationships. It is certainly the case that in India, strong goddesses do not generally cash out in a less sexist society than our own or an acceptance of more dominant or "liberated" social roles for women. In speaking of the Devi-Mahatmya, for example, Coburn notes:

[O]ne of the clear early lessons emerging from feminist study is that one cannot assume that the existence of goddesses, or Goddess texts, in a given culture correlates with favorable social status for women. . . . [T]he Devi-Mahatmya is part of a broader Indian context whose thinking about gender is shaped by many factors other than the fact that the Devi-Mahatmya happens to be a text praising the Goddess. 1

Furthermore, worship of Hindu goddesses or the Great Goddess does not seem to be the special domain of women in Indian society, nor is the Goddess tradition itself necessarily seen as particularly empowering for females. Kathleen Erndl has noted, for example, that worship of the Goddess in India is not really a strong part of Indian feminist discourse, although in certain contexts the Goddess can serve as a source of spiritual empowerment for women.² Similarly, in her own research on interpretations of the

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Devi-Mahatmya, Cynthia Ann Humes has found that most of her contemporary Hindu informants view the Great Goddess and human females as being quite different, although some highly educated and Westernized women see the Goddess as an empowering role model. 3

It is of course important to take such objections seriously. Nevertheless, we must also take seriously the assertions and perceptions of aspects of the tradition that postulate a connection between the divine female and the human female. Even in the Vedic period, for example, the sacrificer's wife was identified with the wife of the gods and the goddess earth during the soma sacrifice.⁴ In many of the Puranas, women are said to be portions (*amsa*) of the Goddess or of her various manifestations. And in his recent fieldwork, William S. Sax has noted parallels between the mythology and pilgrimage rituals pertaining to the cult of the mountain goddess Nandadevi and the lives of the women who worship her.⁵ While not claiming to speak for the experiences of all, or even most, Hindu women, it is nevertheless possible to explore the gender values *supported by* and *reflected in* formulations of the Goddess and goddesses and suggest some of the ways in which the influence of such values might be manifest in certain social tendencies.

If we accept that there may well be some kind of connection, we might then begin by asking the following question: Why is it in fact the case that women in India are not necessarily more socially "liberated" or "empowered" than they are in

other societies that lack a strong goddess tradition, such as ours? As is evidenced by the various goddess cults that have sprung up in the United States in recent years, many contemporary Western feminists posit a clear relationship between strong reverence for female divinity or divinities and the empowerment of human females. The basic assumption of this type of model is that powerful goddesses mean powerful women, and if women have divine females as role models, women will be more liberated

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and/or empowered. Yet this does not seem to be the case in India.

There are at least two ways of approaching such a question. One way is to call into question the way in which Western scholars, and especially Western feminists, understand such notions as "liberation" and "empowerment." It is certainly a form of cultural imperialism to insist that other societies conform to our own cultural norms and expectations; hence, although we might perceive Indian women to be oppressed according to our own social and economic standards, it is perhaps incorrect to assume that Indian women themselves feel oppressed or think of themselves as oppressed. Scholars sympathetic to such a perspective have emphasized the ways in which Indian women interpret their own roles, rituals, and practices as empowering, if not socially then at least spiritually. 6

Another approach, and the one that we will take, is to postulate that despite the reverence for the Goddess in Brahmanical Hinduism, there may be underlying views of female gender as a category that support both a strong goddess tradition and traditional cultural norms for women and that may in fact help limit the social choices that women have. In order to make such a connection, however, we must clearly distinguish between those aspects and qualities of the Great Goddess that are related to her femaleness and those that transcend it.⁷ As Nirguna Brahman, the Goddess is beyond all qualities and therefore transcends any gender category. But as a cosmogonic agent, the Goddess is clearly female.

As we have seen, the Great Goddess functions in primary creation on essentially two different levels: as creative/delusive power (*sakti*) and as materiality (*prakrti*). The principle of *maya* is subsumed under either level or both levels. And in the Brahmanical tradition, these principles are regarded with a deep ambivalence. Let us consider each in turn.

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The Ambiguous Goddess

Sakti/Maya

As *sakti/maya*, the Goddess plays a creative role, as we have seen. But this role can be seen as both positive and negative. When *sakti* is identified with *maya*, it is not only a power of creation, but also a power of delusion that is often seen to be negative. The Narada Purana's account of creation, for example, as we have seen, adopts the categories of Advaita Vedanta such that *sakti* is equated with *maya* and is said to be of two natures: knowledge (*vidya*) and ignorance (*avidya*). As knowledge, it leads to Brahman, but in its capacity as ignorance (*avidya*), which is that aspect of *maya* that leads to the continual round of birth and rebirth, it causes suffering and prevents the realization of Brahman. In her capacity as the power (*sakti*) of *maya*, therefore, the Goddess sometimes has negative connotations.

As pure *sakti*, raw power, the Goddess is not only a cosmogonic force but a cosmological one as well. She pervades creation and sustains it. And as a power active in the world, she is not only creative, but can also be destructive. This aspect of the Goddess is expressed in her many terrible forms and can have either positive or negative connotations. As David Kinsley notes, these forms are usually associated with war, blood, death, and so forth, and they often arise in the context of the Goddess's role as the protector of the cosmos who destroys negative forces and is therefore beneficial to creation. 8 So, for example, the Goddess in her form as Durga is celebrated in the Devi-Mahatmya as the destroyer of demons, which is one of her main functions. In her destructive capacity, she protects and maintains the cosmos by restoring order. The Goddess is also said to be the destroyer of ignorance. This function is performed above all by the goddess Kali, who is one of the Goddess's most terrifying and uncontrollable manifestations. Kali not only destroys demons but also devours them. Yet Kali's wild behavior can be beneficent, especially to those who seek to

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destroy their attachment to the world, for she also brings about favorable spiritual transformation:

Her raised and bloodied sword suggests the death of ignorance, her disheveled hair suggests the freedom of release, and her girdle of severed arms may suggest the end of grasping. As death or the mistress of death she grants to him who sees truly the ultimate boon of unconditioned freedom, release from the cycle of *samsara*, release from pain, sorrow, and not-knowing. 9

Although the destructive forms of the Goddess can be directed toward positive goals, they can also be directed toward negative goals and can therefore cause suffering. Sitāla, for example, is a goddess associated with illness, especially smallpox. Furthermore, even when performing a positive function in battle against demons, the Goddess's destructive manifestations can become threatening and dangerous; Kinsley notes that in such contexts the Goddess delights in blood and death, and when she goes berserk on the battlefield she threatens not only her enemies but also her allies and even the stability of the world itself.¹⁰ According to one account in the Linga Purana, for example, after Kali defeats a demon she goes out of control and threatens to destroy the entire universe.¹¹ As a destructive power, the Goddess is often associated with the forces that can easily lead to disorder.

Prakṛti/Maya

Not only is it the Goddess who as *śakti* makes creation possible, but it is the Goddess who in her capacity as *prakṛti/maya* essentially is creation. Since the manifest world of differentiated forms evolves from unmanifest, undifferentiated *prakṛti*, who is the Goddess, the world is essentially her embodiment. And we find that in the Brahmanical tradition there is a deep ambivalence toward this aspect of the Goddess as well.

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Depending on the perspective, creation itself can be seen as good or bad, liberating or binding. More popular strands of Hinduism celebrate creation and adopt a positive attitude toward the world. Creation is that in and through which one encounters the divine. This more positive attitude is reflected in the reverence expressed for sacred natural sites in India. India herself is felt to be a goddess, Bharat Mata ("mother India"), as well as a sacred land filled with sites that possess sacred power. These sites are places where one can "cross over" (*tr*) to the divine and are thus called *tirthas*. Many *tirthas* are specifically associated with the Goddess and are therefore called "seats" of her power (*śakta pitha*).¹²

In stark contrast to this celebratory attitude toward the manifest world, the ascetic and philosophical strands of Hinduism tend to adopt a much more negative attitude. Physical creation is viewed not as something to be celebrated but rather as something that causes suffering. In these environments, the ultimate goal of human existence is to achieve liberation (*mokṣa*) from the world through various techniques, including ascetic practices that emphasize renunciation of the world. In the quest for liberation, *prakṛti* represents bondage and is therefore that which one must escape. In this capacity, the equation of *prakṛti* with *maya* is often emphasized, for creation itself is felt to be ultimately illusory and represents above all that which prevents one from seeing the true nature of Brahman.

In summary, then, the Brahmanical tradition regards the principles that the Goddess embodies with a great deal of ambivalence. First, as *śakti/maya*, the Goddess is the creative power that is needed for creation to take place, but she is also the power of delusion that prevents one from realizing Brahman. Furthermore, in her cosmological role, she is the force that maintains creation. But she can also be destructive power. Second, as creation itself, which is a manifestation of *prakṛti*, she is that through which one encounters the divine, but she is also that from which one seeks liberation,

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especially as the embodiment of *maya*. Depending on the role she adopts and the way in which she is manifest, the Goddess can be creative or destructive, beneficent or terrible, liberating or binding.

The Ambiguous Female: From Divine to Human

This ambivalence toward the different expressions of the feminine principle is reflected in attitudes toward human women. Women are often said to be portions (*amsa*) of the Goddess or of her various manifestations as different goddesses, and women, like the Goddess, are also embodiments of both power and materiality, *sakti* and *prakrti*. So the ambivalence expressed with respect to the principles that the Goddess embodies also applies to attitudes toward human women. As an embodiment of *sakti*, a woman can be either creative or destructive; as *prakrti*, she can be either liberating or binding. Thus, for example, the Brahmanical tradition is filled with tales of goddesses and women who act both as instruments of salvation and as temptresses who lure sages and ascetics away from their spiritual practices and impede their progress toward liberation. When left to her own devices, the female can go either way. And because she is ambiguous, a woman is always capable of regressing into her least savory aspects. In her regressive capacity, which is an inherent part of the female, she is dangerous. As Wadley notes, danger is the essence of femaleness as it underlies Brahmanical Hindu religious beliefs about women. 13

The ambiguity and danger inherent within femaleness appear to be at least in part a function of the intermediate position that the female occupies. Sherry Ortner has remarked that in many societies, women are seen as dangerous by virtue of being closer to nature than men, who are more fully allied with the processes of culture. Women occupy an intermediate position between nature and culture and therefore mediate between the two.¹⁴ The progressive

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aspects of the female are expressed in those tendencies inherent in female gender that lead from nature, which is associated with chaos and represents disorder, toward culture, which represents order. Women's regressive tendencies are those that lead in the other direction. In the Brahmanical tradition, the intermediacy of the feminine is also reflected on the level of the divine in the transitional place of the Goddess in the process of cosmogony. Between the Absolute and the relative world lies the Goddess, who effects the transition. Since she lies between them, she is the gateway to both. Therefore, she can conduce either to the realization of Brahman and thus liberation (*moksa*) or to bondage in the snares of the phenomenal-empirical world, the continual round of birth and rebirth (*samsara*), as the Narada Purana indicates. 15 Because the female principle is transitional she is ambiguous, and because she is ambiguous she is also dangerous.¹⁶

The intermediate position of the female also means that she straddles the fence between auspiciousness and inauspiciousness. Veena Das has noted that in Indian culture, the category "auspicious" (*subha/mangala*) tends to be associated with all that is on the side of life, the future, and the right side of the body, whereas the category "inauspicious" (*asubha/ amangala*) tends to be associated with death, termination, and the left side of the body.¹⁷ Auspicious/inauspicious are not static qualities, however, but fluid categories that appear to be associated more with processes or events taken in context rather than objects; thus auspiciousness can easily give way to inauspiciousness unless it is reiterated and reinforced.¹⁸ In this regard, Frédérique Marglin notes that female power, *sakti*, is a transformative force that unites auspiciousness and inauspiciousness, allowing events to be resolved in either direction. She remarks, "Female power, *sakti*, signifies the potency of the joining of both auspiciousness and inauspiciousness." ¹⁹ The female as *sakti* has the potential to become inauspicious or to make things become inauspicious; this potential contributes to her dangerousness.

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So, we might ask, how does the human female, who also embodies *sakti and prakrti*, manage to subvert the negative tendencies inherent within her very being and promote her positive aspects? The way in which both goddesses and women are viewed is determined above all by the manner in which they channel their essential character. On both divine and human levels, the paradigms are substantially the same, for both microcosm and macrocosm, society and cosmos, are said to participate in the same essential patterns.

The ambiguity inherent in the Goddess and her manifestations is strongly linked to sexuality and sexual roles. Lawrence Babb was one of the first to note that in both Hindu social and religious symbolism, marriage seems to domesticate the potentially destructive power that females embody, and many other scholars have confirmed Babb's initial observations. 20 Wadley, for example, remarks that Hindu goddesses who are married and have thus transferred control of their sexuality to their husbands are generally benevolent, whereas independent goddesses who control their own sexuality tend to be dangerous and potentially malevolent; David Shulman also notes that the dangerous and sinister aspects of the

Goddess are transmuted into positive, beneficent qualities in the context of marriage and domestication.²¹ Sax summarizes the issue quite well:

The benign, gentle forms of the goddess are, like Hindu brides, quite literally bound: their toes, ankles, waists, fingers, wrists, and especially their hair are bound with rings and bangles and cloth, as if their *sakti* could somehow be dammed up like water. They are like good Hindu wives: meek, submissive, and docile. They have transferred their female energy to their husbands. By contrast, the blood-drinking goddesses are all unmarried. Their hair is loose and flowing, they are unbound, their sexuality is uncontrolled by any male, and it is therefore considered dangerous and threatening.²²

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In a similar vein, Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty notes that Indian goddesses can be divided into two categories, one beneficent and the other malevolent, which she calls the categories "goddesses of the breast" and "goddesses of the tooth." Beneficent goddesses are generally married and remain subservient to their husbands, whereas those who are potentially malevolent dominate their consorts. Thus, beneficent goddesses are sexually controlled by their husbands, whereas potentially malevolent goddesses are sexually more free. This distinction is also expressed in terms of rank, for goddesses in the first group tend to be high-ranking, whereas those in the second group tend to be low-ranking.²³

Recently, the simple model of married/benevolent female versus single/malevolent female has been questioned. C. Mackenzie Brown, for example, challenges the universality of this "marriage control model," as he terms it, and questions whether it fits the portrayal of the Goddess in the Devi-Mahatmya and the Devi-Bhagavata Purana.²⁴ Based on his own observations about the portrayal of the goddess Santosi Ma on film, Stanley Kurtz also argues that this model has its limitations. Kurtz has noted that it is primarily the nurturing, motherly qualities of a goddess, either married or unmarried, over any other that cause that goddess to be seen as benevolent and the lack of such qualities that causes her to be seen as malevolent. The favorable portrayal of an individual goddess, then, may have less to do with whether or not she is a wife than with whether or not she is a nurturing, motherly female. Hence Kurtz wants to graft a motherly/unmotherly model onto the marriage control model.²⁵

One must be mindful of these scholars' objections, for the marriage control model may in fact need to be modified, as Kurtz has suggested. In this regard, an order/ disorder dynamic may underlie both the married/unmarried and the motherly/unmotherly paradigms. When a god-

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dess is portrayed as threatening patterns of order, regardless of whether she is married or unmarried, she is viewed as dangerous, unmotherly, and malevolent. Likewise, when a goddess is portrayed as upholding order, regardless of whether she is married or unmarried, she tends to be viewed as nurturing, motherly, and benevolent. Even destructive goddesses are viewed as "good" if they uphold patterns of order. The goddess Durga, for example, who is unmarried and destructive, helps maintain order by destroying the forces that threaten the world; hence she is viewed as benevolent and is frequently invoked as "mother."

The Goddess and her manifestations, then, are viewed in a positive light when their natures are channeled in a way that creates order, as in the function of the Goddess in the creation of the cosmos, or maintains/restores order, as in Durga's role as the destroyer of demons. In such cases, goddesses are considered to be good, even when they are destructive. When a goddess is unchanneled or is channeled in a way that leads to disorder or the destruction of order, she is bad. Some goddesses, most notably Kali, seem to embody both of these tendencies. Generally, then, the positive outlets for the nature of the ambiguous female on the divine level consist in those that harness the feminine principle in ways that lead to creation of the cosmos on the one hand, or maintenance of the cosmos on the other.

What about the human level? The interpretation of female gender as a category implicates many dimensions of experience, yet the representation of the essence of the feminine as *sakti* and *prakrti* on the human level, as on the divine level, is strongly linked to female sexuality.²⁶ Not surprisingly, the Brahmanical tradition tends to view women's sexuality with great suspicion. Sexuality is, on one level, pure *sakti*, raw power, expressed as unmediated libidinal desire, and the uninhibited expression of sexual desire is seen as not only inappropriate for women, but also potentially harmful.

ality as being so uncontrollable and irresponsible that women are apt to place sexual gratification above family well-being. The Manu-Smṛti, for example, claims that because of their passion for men and their natural heartlessness, women are prone to be disloyal to their husbands. 27 The *Strīdharmapaddhati* of Tryambaka, the only major extant treatise fully devoted to discussion of the nature (*svabhava*) and duties (*dharma*) particular to women, confirms this view. 28 I. Julia Leslie notes in her discussion of this text that "in the human realm, as in the divine, the untamed female nature with all the negative associations of female sexuality is antisocial, elemental, and dangerous." 29 Sax notes also that women's sexual desires are commonly believed to threaten men's well-being, both with respect to their physical vitality, which is correlated with their supply of semen, and their spiritual discipline, which emphasizes renunciation of sexual desire. 30 The drive of female desire creates a condition of inherent danger to social order, for a woman's desire for sex may lead her to engage in "inappropriate" sexual conduct, that is, to engage in sex outside of socially sanctioned circumstances. Such conduct, in turn, may lead to disastrous consequences.

The danger inherent in female sexuality can also be attributed in part to the exchange of bodily fluids that takes place during intercourse. O'Flaherty emphasizes the ambiguous nature of the fluids that issue forth from a woman's body. Milk, which flows from the breasts and symbolizes the maternal role of the female, is generally good, although it becomes ambiguous when attributed with erotic qualities. Sexual fluid, on the other hand, which flows from the genitals and symbolizes the sexual role of the female, is generally bad and potentially dangerous. This danger can be realized when there is an imbalance in the sexual fluids of a man and woman engaging in coitus. In such a situation, the man may be adversely affected. 31

In Brahmanical Hinduism, one of the greatest dangers with respect to female sexuality lies in the female's vulner-

ability to ritual pollution through sex, which in turn leads to disorder or matter out of place. This aspect of female gender can be attributed especially to her nature as *prakṛti*, which is commonly described as the "field" (*kṣetra*) that is opposed to pure consciousness, *puruṣa*, which is the "knower of the field" (*kṣetrājña*) and is often allied with male gender. In a similar vein, women, who embody *prakṛti*, are described metaphorically as the field in which men plant the seed during insemination. 32 As the field, a woman can become polluted, whereas the seed is not vulnerable to pollution in the same way. Therefore, for the female, sexual promiscuity is a sure road to pollution, for sex with different partners leads to exchange of bodily substance, which in turn leads to pollution of the "field."

Such concerns about pollution tie into concerns about caste and caste purity. Ronald Inden and McKim Marriott have proposed that caste hierarchy, which has traditionally structured social order in Hindu India, is governed by the differentiation of all living beings into unique genera (*jatis*), each of which is thought to have a defining encoded substance or "substance-code." These defining particles of substance are transmitted genetically from one generation to the next. When bodily substances are improperly mixed, the coded substance defining the caste is altered. 33 Since the woman, as the field, is the fertile matrix in which the child gestates, she must maintain purity of substance-code in order to maintain purity of her offspring and, thus, purity of caste. Mixture of caste is mixture of substance-code; it is matter out of place and thus represents disorder. Regulation of female sexuality is vital to the stability of society, for breakdown of caste is said to lead to breakdown of the social order.

The crux of the matter, then, is the way in which female sexuality is employed and expressed. When it conduces to order, it is good; when it conduces to disorder, it is bad. The association of free use of female sexuality with chaos and matter out of place, which represents disorder and

threatens cultural institutions, provides a support for ethical and moral evaluations of female sexuality that are simply not

applicable to men. Women who enjoy sex and use their sexuality primarily to satisfy themselves are potentially bad since they threaten social order, whereas men who do the same are not subject to such judgments. If it is to be beneficent, female sexuality must be given an outlet in society that establishes or reinforces the human social order in the same way that the essence of the Goddess is channeled in a way that establishes or reinforces cosmic order. In other words, the channeling of female sexuality must parallel the channeling of the Goddess's essence in the creation or maintenance of the cosmos. A woman's proper role in Hindu society, then, is to direct her essence, her sexuality, into the creation and maintenance of the social order. The threatening aspects of her nature, those that lead to disorder, are therefore neutralized.

Women and Creation of the Social Order

Acceptable expressions of the female's essence are located above all in prescribed roles that provide a socially constructive outlet for female sexuality, that is, one that literally helps to construct society as the Goddess constructs the world. In order for this sexuality to be constructive, it must be brought under control, and its dangerous aspects those that lead to disorder must be neutralized through the imposition of order. The best way to do this is, of course, through marriage. Whenever a woman properly transfers control of her essential nature to a male through marriage, she may be viewed as benevolent. 34 The importance of marriage for females is reflected in the fact that the dominant norms for the Hindu woman concern her role as a good wife (*pativrata*) who remains at all times devoted to her husband. Even her spiritual life should be directed into this role. In her research on votive observances among North Indian women, Mary McGee has found that a mar-

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ried woman's auspiciousness or marital felicity (*saubhagya*) is particularly related to her performance of votive rites on behalf of her husband and family:

The *dharma* of women is summarized in the role of the devoted wife (*pativrata*) whose duties and devotions are directed solely towards the well-being of her husband. In many ways, the life of the *pativrata* is the *vrata* [vow] *par excellence* of women. It is through fulfilling this *vrata* of service and devotion to the husband that a woman is rewarded in this world and the next. The life of the *pativrata* allows a woman the opportunity to pursue three of the four aims of Hindu life (*purusartha*) religious duty (*dharma*), wealth (*artha*), and pleasure (*kama*) while striving for a moral perfection leading to the fourth, liberation (*moksa*). 35

As a proper wife, a woman is not only devoted to her husband, but in fact also becomes part of him, just as the Goddess is originally part of her male consort in many of the Puranas. The loss of a woman's identity to her husband is noted by Vanaja Dhruvarajan in her study of women's lives in an Indian village in south-central India. Dhruvarajan notes that a wife refers to her husband as "my lord, " or, using the formal third person, as "they, " whereas a husband refers to his wife as "she who is mine" or "she who shares half of my being. "36

The ideology concerning the duties and conduct of a proper wife or *pativrata* emphasizes both the subordination of the woman to her husband and, most important, her sexual continence. A good wife is above all a chaste wife. A woman who uses her sexuality for any purpose other than providing for her husband's pleasure and bearing his children threatens not only the welfare of her husband but also the stability of society. Correct use of sexuality in marriage maintains order, whereas any other use of sexuality leads to disorder. In this regard, Wadley notes:

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The powers of the chaste woman have no equal. Most critically, these are powers that are bound: they are powers that are built upon a culturally perceived morality, they are powers of order. The benevolent woman and the benevolent goddesses are those who maintain order and who are themselves regulated. 37

Thus, for example, Sita, the wife of Ram, who guards her chastity against the advances of a demon and remains faithful to her husband even when threatened with death, represents the highest standard for a good Hindu bride.38

The fulfillment of a married woman's role occurs when she becomes a mother, especially a mother of male children, who

are much more valued than female children. Children represent an expression of female sexual functioning that is not only socially acceptable, but also desirable and necessary. As a wife who is also a mother, a woman lies at the threshold between nature and culture: the processes of reproduction are natural, but the result of these processes—namely, the child and the family constituted by children and parents—is also a social-cultural unit.³⁹ The function performed by a mother guarantees the survival of the family line and of the community and therefore reinforces the social order. Hence also Kurtz's observation that it is primarily the motherly qualities of a goddess that determine her beneficence.

In an interesting way, the standard life pattern of an Indian woman as a wife who then becomes a mother parallels the role of the feminine principle in cosmogony. In the patterns that we have seen in the Puranic accounts of creation, the Goddess brings about the creation of the manifest world through her transition from pure power to material matrix, from which ordered forms then arise. In this regard, the role of the Goddess in cosmogony represents the quintessential paradigm for the constructive, beneficent expression of the feminine principle, for in cosmogony the Goddess is always cast in a good role, since

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she is channeling her essential character into a creative act that leads to order. This is also the pattern reflected in the culturally sanctioned trajectory of human women, who channel their *sakti* in the form of sexuality to their husbands, and then, as mothers, become the material matrix from which progeny spring. The production of progeny parallels the production of the cosmos. It is therefore not surprising that in India, a new wife is often not fully accepted into her husband's family until she becomes a mother, for until she has children, she has not yet completed her trajectory.

Women and Maintenance of the Social Order

What about females who do not follow this standard pattern? Goddesses who sublimate their essential nature and channel it into roles in politics, art, academic activity, and so forth are generally viewed as beneficent. Such activities direct female essence into constructive outlets that strengthen and reinforce culture. Thus we find in the Brahmanical tradition a rich mythology of goddesses who are associated with various forms of cultural activity, such as Sarasvati, the goddess of knowledge and patroness of the arts and sciences, and Durga, the leader of armies. These different goddesses contribute to the maintenance of society and, therefore, are also expressions of properly channeled feminine nature. To what extent are these divine expressions of the feminine principle seen as examples that women should emulate? One might argue that such goddesses provide empowering role models for human women. In this regard, scholars have pointed out that India is one of the few democratic countries to have been ruled by a woman, Indira Gandhi, who was especially revered because of her power and was even depicted by one artist as Durga riding on her tiger. ⁴⁰ Women who become educators could invoke the model of Sarasvati, who is usually depicted in iconography alone even though she is married to the god Brahma.

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It must be said, however, that there are comparatively few women who have been able to appropriate effectively these more independent roles. Benevolent and submissive goddesses like Sita are the ones that are generally upheld as the best exemplars of proper female behavior; independent goddesses, however, even when they are "good," are not usually interpreted in this way, and dangerous goddesses like Kali are usually understood primarily as metaphors for spiritual, mental, or physical processes but certainly not as role models for behavior. Even Indira Gandhi was likened to Durga by others only after she became prime minister of India as a way of making sense of her role, but she herself did not uphold Durga as a role model either for her own conduct or for that of other women. One reason behind such distinctions may be that a strong, independent female is still thought to possess a free-floating chaotic potential, whereas a married female who is controlled by her husband is far less likely to be able to give expression to such a potential. Thus the role of a woman as wife and mother has been the dominant cultural norm for the proper expression of female gender in traditional Indian society, as in most societies.

The idea that women are concrete expressions of both *sakti* and *prakṛti* continues to influence and, one might argue, restrict the roles that women play in contemporary Indian society, the activities in which they participate, and, most important, the amount of choice that they have in their lives. The question is, to what extent could this system function as

a positive paradigm for Indian women that recognizes their power and gives it a place, and to what extent is it a paradigm created by males that inherently represents women as unstable and dangerous? In other words, is the paradigm itself inherently repressive, or does the problem lie more in the ways in which the images have been used and interpreted? Is it possible for Indian women to claim their power from within the tradition in a way that increases the amount of choice they have in their lives? Or

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must they reject all traditional conceptions of femaleness in search of freedom from gender definition if they are to undertake new roles?

One important issue in evaluating these different possibilities is how the more independent but "good" images of the female embodied by goddesses like Durga and Sarasvati may be more self-consciously and consistently appropriated by Indian women as effective role models. Until recently, the social institutions that dominated India have not really provided paths for women to follow in pursuit of nontraditional options. Although the divine models may have been there as potential resources, the situation "on the ground" has not provided any possibility for women to appropriate them. As India changes, more options are becoming available. It is now possible for Hindu women not only to consciously draw upon goddess mythology in redefining their place in society, but also to pursue the options that this mythology, coupled with institutional support, provides. As Wadley notes, as women take more powerful positions in India, they can find validation for their new roles in long-standing Hindu textual traditions. 41

Further potential lies in how the relationship between the more dangerous goddesses and women might be reconsidered. The range of ways in which goddesses have been interpreted from role model to metaphor is not inherent in the goddess materials themselves but rather appears to reflect social agendas that aim to keep women bound to traditional roles. Why not recast this paradigm in favor of a new one that is more radical and empowering for women? Why not, for example, invoke Kali not as a metaphor but as a kind of role model? As a goddess associated with transformative processes, Kali could well serve as a symbol of women's desire to transform and empower both their own lives and Hindu culture in general.

No matter what the answers ultimately may be, we cannot ignore the fact that in India, despite the rich tradition of goddess reverence, the human female has been and contin-

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ues to be tremendously undervalued. As traditional institutions such as caste change, it would seem logical that the regulation of women and the danger that women's control over their own nature represents to social order should begin to change. Such transformations, however, appear to be slow in coming. The lack of support for fast or pervasive change in the status of women in contemporary India is not surprising given the larger social, mythological, and ideological concerns to which conceptions about female gender have been tied for centuries, and it appears that the freedoms accorded generously to Indian men probably will not easily be extended to women. Despite such obstacles, however, we must nevertheless recognize that the Brahmanical Hindu tradition supports a rich mythology pertaining to goddesses and postulates an important place for the feminine principle in its understanding of cosmogony and cosmology. The problem appears to lie more in the ways that the images of the different goddesses and the Great Goddess have been interpreted and applied and the emphases that have been given to the various dimensions of the feminine than in the very symbols that the tradition itself has generated. If this is the case, then it may very well be possible for Indian women to appropriate these images in ways that are more empowering than the ways in which they have been appropriated in the past.

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Notes

Introduction

1. Sir Monier Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, rev. ed. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1988), p. 654.
2. Thomas Coburn, *Devi-Mahatmya: The Crystallization of the Goddess Tradition* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1984), p. 186.
3. Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, p. 1044.
4. Susan S. Wadley, "Women and the Hindu Tradition, " in *Women in India: Two Perspectives*, edited by Doranne Jacobson and Susan S. Wadley (Columbia, Mo. : South Asia Books, 1977), p. 115.
5. See David Kinsley, *The Sword and the Flute: Kali and Krsna; Dark Visions of the Terrible and the Sublime in Hindu Mythology* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1975), pp. 109-114, 133-139, and *Hindu Goddesses: Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986), pp. 133-137; P. G. Layle, *Studies in DeviBhagavata* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1973), pp. 147-169; and Coburn, *Devi-Mahatmya*, pp. 123-127, 146-153, 180-186.
6. In dating Tantric literature from the ninth century, I am following Teun Goudriaan. Other scholars have argued for earlier dates. For a discussion of the dating of the Tantric literature and a summary of different scholars' views, see Sanjukta Gupta and Teun Goudriaan, *Hindu Tantric and Sakta Literature*, vol. 2, fasc. 2 of *A History of Indian Literature* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1981), pp. 19-21.
7. The term "cosmology" refers to reflection regarding the

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- general nature and structure of the created universe. "Cosmogony, " on the other hand, refers to accounts of the act of creation or birth (*gonos*) of the cosmos itself.
8. The history of this literature is extremely complex and cannot be undertaken in any detail here. There are many standard works available that provide elaborate discussions of this history. See, for example, Arthur Berriedale Keith, *The Religion and Philosophy of the Veda and Upanisads*, Harvard Oriental Series, vols. 31-32 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1925); Maurice Winternitz, *A History of Indian Literature*, translated by V. Srinivasa Sarma and Subhadra Jha, 3 vols. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1985-1988); Erich Frauwallner, *History of Indian Philosophy*, translated by V. M. Bedekar, 2 vols. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1973); and Ludo Rocher, *The Puranas*, vol. 2, fasc. 3 of *A History of Indian Literature*, (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1986).
 9. For more discussion of these texts, see James Santucci, *An Outline of Vedic Literature*, (Missoula, Mont. : Scholars Press, 1976).
 10. For more on the oral nature of the Puranas, see C. Mackenzie Brown, "Purana as Scripture: From Sound to Image of the Holy Word in the Hindu Tradition, " *History of Religions* 26, no. 1 (August 1986): 68-86.
 11. This view is particularly strong in the school of Purva-Mimamsa philosophy.
 12. See Thomas B. Coburn, "The Study of the Puranas and the Study of Religion, " *Religious Studies* 16, no. 3 (September 1980): 341-352.
 13. C. Mackenzie Brown, *The Triumph of the Goddess: The Canonical Models and Theological Visions of the Devi-Bhagavata Purana* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), p. 5.
 14. Ibid. , p. 3.
 15. Ibid. , p. 4.
 16. Vincent B. Leitch, *Deconstructive Criticism: An Advanced Introduction* (New York: Columbia University Press,

1983), p. 59. See also Umberto Eco, *Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979), p. 21: "Intertextual knowledge . . . can be considered a special case of overcoding and establishes its own intertextual frames (frequently identified with genre rules). . . . Intertextual frames . . . are already literary 'topoi,' narrative schemes."

17. A. K. Ramanujan has also discussed intertextuality in relation to Indian texts. See A. K. Ramanujan, "On Folk Mythologies and Folk Puranas," in *Purana Perennis: Reciprocity and Transformation in Hindu and Jain Texts*, edited by Wendy Doniger (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), p. 105.
18. J. C. Heesterman, "Veda and Dharma," in *The Concept of Duty in South Asia*, edited by Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty and J. Duncan M. Derrett (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1978), p. 80.
19. Brian K. Smith, *Reflections on Resemblance, Ritual, and Religion* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 20. Smith quotes Louis Renou, *The Destiny of the Veda in India*, edited and translated by Dev Raj Chanana (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1965), p. 2.
20. Although the categorization of Vedic scripture as *sruti* and post-Vedic Brahmanical scripture as *smṛti* is a traditionally accepted schema, these categories are actually somewhat fluid, and scriptures that are traditionally categorized as *smṛti*, such as the Puranas, sometimes claim divine or *sruti* status. Coburn, for example, notes that there is a tradition that views the Puranas as having a divine origin. See Coburn, "Study of the Puranas and the Study of Religion," pp. 343-344.
21. Barbara A. Holdrege, *Veda and Torah: Transcending the Textuality of Scripture* (Albany: State University of New York Press, forthcoming).
22. Ibid., ms. pp. 8-9.

Chapter One. The Feminine Principle in the Vedas

1. F. B. J. Kuiper, "Cosmogony and Conception: A Query," *History of Religions* 10, no. 2 (November 1970): 98-104.
2. W. Norman Brown, "Theories of Creation in the Rig Veda," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 85, no. 1 (January-March 1965): 27.
3. David Kinsley makes the point that there is no one Great Goddess in the Vedic literature and that the expression of a single Mahadevi is a much later product of a carefully articulated theology. See Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses*, p. 18. Although I agree overall with Kinsley, it is important to note that one can find underlying thematic patterns that are clearly associated with many different

female divinities and characterize more than one goddess.

4. See, for example, Rg-Veda 7. 49. 1-4, 10. 9. 1-7; Atharva-Veda 1. 5. 1, 1. 6. 3-4.
5. See, for example, Rg-Veda 4. 3. 12.
6. All translations throughout the book are my own unless otherwise indicated.
7. See, for example, Rg-Veda 4. 3. 12; Vajasaneyi Samhita 6. 27, 10. 7; Taittiriya Samhita 1. 2. 1, 1. 3. 8; Atharva-Veda 1. 4. 3, 1. 6. 1.
8. See, for example, Rg-Veda 1. 95. 4-5, 1. 143. 1, 2. 35. 2-13, 7. 9. 3, 10. 8. 5.
9. Rg-Veda 1. 22. 6, 6. 50. 13.

10. Rg-Veda 10. 63. 2.

11. Rg-Veda 6. 50. 7, 10. 30. 10, 10. 9. 5.

12. Kuiper, "Cosmogony and Conception, " pp. 100-104. See also H. W. Bodewitz, "The Waters in Vedic Cosmic Classifications, " *Indologica Taurinensia* 10 (1982): 49-50.

13. Rg-Veda 10. 72 also describes the gods assembling in the waters (*salila*), presumably before the dawn of creation as they are described as drawing forth from the ocean the sun, which was hidden in the ocean. Without the sun, there can be no light, and the primordial phase of creation is elsewhere (e. g. , 10. 129) described as being characterized by lack of light.

14. Or, perhaps, beheld together.

15. Franklin Edgerton has provided fine translations for some of the hymns discussed in this chapter, including this one. In such cases, I follow fairly closely, although not exactly, his translations. See Franklin Edgerton, *The Beginnings of Indian Philosophy: Selections from the Rig Veda, Atharva Veda, Upanisads, and Mahabharata* (Cambridge, Mass. : Harvard University Press, 1965).

16. Atharva-Veda 4. 2. 8.

17. Taittiriya Samhita 5. 6. 4. 2-3.

18. See, for example, Rg-Veda 10. 9. 1, 3.

19. Rg-Veda 1. 144. 2.

20. See, for example, Rg-Veda 6. 51. 5, 10. 18. 10; Vajasaneyi Samhita 2. 10, 9. 22; Atharva-Veda 12. 1. 63.

21. In this hymn, the earth is associated with the plants (*osadhi*) with which the waters are associated in the Taittiriya Samhita.

22. Atharva-Veda 12. 1. 2-17.

23. Atharva-Veda 12. 1. 17.

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24. Atharva-Veda 12. 1. 7-10, 12. 1. 6.

25. Atharva-Veda 5. 25. 2, 6. 17. 1, 12. 1. 43.

26. Atharva-Veda 12. 1. 1.

27. Rg-Veda 1. 159. 2, 1. 185. 4. See also Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses*, p. 8.

28. Rg-Veda 1. 185. 7.

29. See, for example, Maitrayani Samhita 1. 6. 3 and Kathaka Samhita 8. 2. This theme is then picked up in later accounts of creation.

30. Rg-Veda 1. 159. 2.

31. Atharva-Veda 12. 1. 12.

32. See, for example, Rg-Veda 1. 153. 3, 8. 90. 15.

33. Atharva-Veda 6. 120. 2; Atharva-Veda 7. 6. 2, 7. 6. 4 and Vajasaneyi Samhita 9. 5; Rg-Veda 2. 27. 7 (literally, having kings as sons or having princely sons [*rajaputra*]). See also Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses*, pp. 9-10.

34. See, for example, Atharva-Veda 12. 1. 61, 13. 1. 38; Vajasaneyi Samhita 13. 18.
35. Rg-Veda 1. 185. 3. See also Atharva-Veda 12. 3. 11.
36. Atharva-Veda 7. 6. 2.
37. Rg-Veda 1. 89. 10.
38. The term used here is *vaja*, which can also mean wealth or treasure.
39. F. Max Muller, trans. *Vedic Hymns*, Sacred Books of the East, vol. 32 (1891; reprint, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1964), p. 248. For a brief review of various scholarly opinions about the nature of Aditi, see A. A. Macdonell, *Vedic Mythology* (1898; reprint, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1974), p. 123.
40. Muller, *Vedic Hymns*, p. 241.
41. Rg-Veda 10. 130. 5.
42. Rg-Veda 10. 90. 5.
43. In some passages *viraj* is an epithet applied to Indra, Prajapati, and Parameshthin. See also W. D. Whitney, *Atharva-Veda-Samhita*, Harvard Oriental Series, vols. 7-8 (1905; 2d Indian reprint ed. , Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1971), vol. 2, p. 508. Atharva-Veda 8. 9. 10 asks, "who understands (*pravid*) the pairness (*mithunatva*) of Viraj?" Whitney understands *mithunatva* to refer especially to the condition of being a pair of opposite sexes.
44. For more on Viraj and her role in this hymn, see also

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André Padoux, *Vac: The Concept of the Word in Selected Hindu Tantras*, translated by Jacques Gontier (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), pp. 9-10. In discussing Atharva-Veda 8. 9 and 8. 10, Padoux says, "There *viraj* appears as the cosmic cow, identical with Vac, whose calf is Indra and who is once described becoming masculine for the occasion as 'the father of *brahman*. . . . ' *Viraj*, therefore, is identified with *vac*. Moreover (in accordance with its etymology, vi plus the root RAJ), she appears as an active principle, ruling, luminous, nourishing, and feminine, as a creative energy which might already, because of this aspect and role, prefigure the *sakti* of the later periods (and furthermore, this is an energy which is the Word). "

45. Edgerton suggests for this last verse, "She is the one who knows that upon which we both may subsist, let us invoke her. "

46. See also Jan Gonda, "The 'Original' Sense and the Etymology of Skt. *maya*, " in *Four Studies in the Language of the Veda*, Disputationes Rheno-Trajectinae, vol. 3 (The Hague: Mouton, 1959), p. 155. Gonda comments upon the cited passage as follows:

The text recites the curious migrations and metamorphoses of Viraj . . . which here is considered the first principle, the universe in the beginning. She came, successively, to the asuras, the Fathers, men etc. , and each of these categories of beings calls her by a special name which of course is nothing but an aspect of her nature and essence. Moreover, each class of creature milks her and her milk upon which these beings are stated to subsist is mostly identical with the 'idea' or 'substance' indicated by that name. . . . The conclusion must be that there is, in the view of the author, a special relation between asuras and *maya*, for they call to her "O *maya*, " and she yields them *maya*, upon which the asuras are said to subsist.

47. Gonda (ibid.) characterizes her as "a creative principle representing also the idea of ruling far and wide, being the sum of all existence, the hypostatization of the conception of the universe as a whole. "

48. See Atharva-Veda 8. 10. 22ff. , where Viraj is described in conjunction with milking-pails and calves of different varieties. See also Atharva-Veda 9. 2. 5, where she is explicitly identified as a cow and is also called Vac.

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49. Atharva-Veda 9. 10. 24.
 50. Atharva-Veda 8. 9. 8-10.
 51. Atharva-Veda 8. 9. 11.
 52. See also Holdrege, *Veda and Torah*, ms. p. 42.
 53. Rg-Veda 10. 71. 1.
 54. Rg-Veda 10. 71. 3-4. See also Holdrege, *Veda and Torah*, ms. p. 43.
 55. W. Norman Brown has published an excellent study and careful translation of this hymn, and I have followed his translation fairly closely. See W. Norman Brown, "Agni, Sun, Sacrifice, and Vac: A Sacerdotal Ode by Dirghatamas (Rig Veda 1. 164), " *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 88, no. 2 (April-June 1968): 217.
 56. Rg-Veda 10. 125. 3-8.
 57. See also Brown's translation in "Agni, Sun, Sacrifice, and Vac, " pp. 216-217. For a discussion regarding the translation of the term *aksara* ("syllable, imperishable"), see J. A. B. van Buitenen, "Aksara, " *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 79, no. 3 (July-September 1959): 176-187. Note that the term *salila* (pl. *salilani*) is also the term used for the primordial waters in 10. 129. 3.
- Vac is not explicitly identified in the hymn with the buffalo, but Sayana equates the two.
58. See, for example, Taittiriya Samhita 2. 1. 6; Vajasaneyi Samhita 10. 30.
 59. See, for example, Rg-Veda 6. 61. 4, 6; Vajasaneyi Samhita 21. 32-33.
 60. See, for example, Rg-Veda 10. 30. 12-13; Vajasaneyi Samhita 20. 75.
 61. Rg-Veda 2. 41. 17.
 62. Rg-Veda 6. 61. 11-12.
 63. Rg-Veda 2. 41. 16, 6. 61. 2, 6. 61. 8, 7. 95. 1.
 64. See, for example, Rg-Veda 1. 13. 9, 1. 142. 9, 9. 6. 8, 10. 110. 8, 10. 17. 7. The identities of the other two goddesses fluctuate, but they are usually called Ila and Mahi or, in Vajasaneyi Samhita, Ida and Bharati.
 65. Rg-Veda 1. 3. 12, 6. 49. 7.
 66. For more detailed speculation on this problem, see S. K. Das, *Sakti or Divine Power* (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1934), pp. 34ff.

67. Rg-Veda 8. 89. 11.
68. Macdonell, *Vedic Mythology*, p. 58.
69. See Das, *Sakti or Divine Power*, p. 11. He has found that *sacbhis*, the instrumental plural of *saci*, is used over thirty times in the Rg-Veda.
70. See also Das, *Sakti or Divine Power*, p. 12; and Macdonnell, *Vedic Mythology*, p. 57.
71. Das, *Sakti or Divine Power*, pp. 15-16.

72. Although I include in this section references to two of the Aranyakas, the Sankhayana Aranyaka and the Aitareya Aranyaka, the predominant emphasis is on the Brahmanas.

73. Jaiminiya Brahmana 1. 237.

74. Satapatha Brahmana 6. 8. 2. 2.

75. Satapatha Brahmana 7. 4. 1. 6.

76. Satapatha Brahmana 6. 1. 3. 11, 6. 8. 2. 3.

77. Satapatha Brahmana 1. 1. 1. 14.

78. See, for example, Aitareya Brahmana 2. 16, Satapatha Brahmana 14. 3. 2. 13.

79. See above, p. 39.

80. Kausitaki Brahmana 25. 1.

81. Satapatha Brahmana 1. 1. 1. 18.

82. Jaiminiya Brahmana 1. 140; Satapatha Brahmana 6. 8. 2. 3.

83. Satapatha Brahmana 9. 4. 1. 10.

84. Pañcavimsa Brahmana 7. 8. 1.

85. See, for example, Satapatha Brahmana 7. 4. 2. 6 and 7. 4. 1. 8.

86. Satapatha Brahmana 7. 3. 1. 20.

87. Satapatha Brahmana 14. 1. 3. 25.

88. See, for example, Satapatha Brahmana 5. 3. 1. 4, 6. 5. 3. 1, 4. 6. 9. 16.

89. See, for example, Satapatha Brahmana 2. 2. 1. 19, 5. 3. 1. 4, 6. 5. 4. 2, 7. 4. 2. 7; Kausitaki Brahmana 6. 14.

90. Sankhayana Aranyaka 7. 16 (7. 15).

91. Satapatha Brahmana 6. 5. 2. 20.

92. See, for example, Satapatha Brahmana 8. 3. 2. 13, 8. 5. 2. 2, 13. 6. 2. 3, 13. 7. 1. 2.

93. See, for example, Satapatha Brahmana 5. 2. 2. 13-14, 5. 3. 4. 25, 5. 4. 5. 7, 13. 1. 8. 5, 14. 2. 1. 12; Jaiminiya Brahmana 1. 82; Pañcavimsa Brahmana 6. 7. 7.

94. Satapatha Brahmana 11. 1. 6. 3.

95. See also Jaiminiya Brahmana 1. 104, where Prajapati again creates through speech.

96. For a more detailed exploration of this association, see S. K Lal, *Female Divinities in Hindu Mythology and Ritual* (Poona: University of Poona, 1980), pp. 159-160.

97. Sankhayana Aranyaka 7. 1.

98. Satapatha Brahmana 12. 8. 2. 6, 8. 6. 3. 22. Aitareya Aranyaka 1. 3. 2 and Aitareya Brahmana 5. 23 and 5. 33 also pair off mind and speech.

99. Satapatha Brahmana 1. 4. 4. 1, 1. 4. 4. 7.

100. Satapatha Brahmana 3. 2. 4. 11, 1. 4. 5. 11. Satapatha Brahmana 4. 6. 7. 5, however, gives speech its due by arguing that mind cannot be made known without speech. See also Satapatha Brahmana 1. 4. 4. 5-7, 10. 5. 3. 3-4; and Lal, *Female Divinities*, p. 160.

101. See, for example, Pañcavimsa Brahmana 7. 6. 17, 16. 10. 8, 18. 6. 11; Jaiminiya Brahmana 1. 128; Aitareya Brahmana 4. 28. For the equation between Vac and the earth, see note 88 above. The *rathantara* is also identified in Pañcavimsa Brahmana 7. 7. 16 as procreative energy or semen (*prajanana*).

102. For more detail, see Lal, *Female Divinities*, p. 160.

103. See also Holdrege, *Veda and Torah*, ms. p. 47.

104. Jaiminiya Brahmana 1. 128. In Jaiminiya Brahmana 1. 270, speech is again correlated with earth, but mind is correlated not with heaven but with the waters:

And he combines the divine *dhurs* with the human *dhurs*. The mind is a human *dhur*, the waters (*ap*) are a divine *dhur*. . . . Speech is a human *dhur*, the earth a divine *dhur* (the term *dhur* refers to a particular set of Gayatri verses).

105. Satapatha Brahmana 7. 5. 1. 31, 8. 5. 2. 3, 11. 2. 4. 9, 11. 2. 6. 3. In at least one place, Satapatha Brahmana 12. 9. 1. 13, Indra is equated with mind.

106. Jaiminiya Brahmana 1. 128.

107. Jaiminiya Brahmana 1. 19; Satapatha Brahmana 1. 5. 1. 21. Or, the offering spoon (*sruk*) is Vac, the dipping spoon (*sruva*) is breath/Prajapati (Satapatha Brahmana 6. 3. 1. 8-9).

108. See also Satapatha Brahmana 1. 4. 4. 4-5, 6. 3. 1. 9.

109. See Satapatha Brahmana 11. 1. 6. 3; Pañcavimsa Brahmana 7. 6. 1-3; and Pañcavimsa Brahmana 20. 14. 2, cited above.

110. Satapatha Brahmana 2. 4. 4. 2.

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111. Satapatha Brahmana 10. 5. 2. 14.

112. Brhadaranyaka Upanisad 4. 2. 2-3.

113. Brhadaranyaka Upanisad 3. 6, 5. 5. 1.

114. Aitareya Upanisad 1. 1. 3-4. The formation of creation from the body of a primal man, Purusa, is first recounted in Rg-Veda 10. 90.

115. Aitareya Upanisad 1. 1. 4.

116. Satapatha Brahmana 10. 6. 5. 1-2.

117. Satapatha Brahmana 10. 6. 5. 4-5.

118. See also Holdrege, *Veda and Torah*, ms. p. 51: "In the first phase of creation the Creator, desiring to have a 'second self' (*dvitiya atman*), enters into union with Vac by means of his mind (*manas*). The seed becomes the year, which is consistently identified with Prajapati in the Brahmanas. In the second phase, which is distinguished from the first phase by the period of a year, a child, representing the 'second self of the Creator, is born and cries out, producing speech (*vac*). This speech represents the second phase of Vac, and it is from this expressed level of speech that the *rks*, *yajuses*, *samans*, meters, sacrifices, human beings, and animals are brought forth. "

119. Brhadaranyaka Upanisad 1. 5. 11.

120. Chandogya Upanisad 1. 13. 2.

Chapter Two. Prakrti, Maya, and Sakti: The Feminine Principle in Philosophical Discourse

1. See Coburn, *Devi-Mahatmya*, p. 181.

2. Ibid. See also *Nirukta* 2. 2, 28. Coburn also notes that the term occasionally just means "the norm, the usual way." He cites as evidence the Sankhayana Srauta-Sutra 6. 1. 2, 14. 1. 1.

3. See, for example, Sankhayana Srauta-Sutra 1. 16. 1-2. See also the commentary on Apastamba's Yajña Paribhasa-Sutra 114 in *The Grhya-Sutras*, Sacred Books of the East, edited by F. Max Muller, translated by Hermann Oldenberg, vol. 30 (1892: reprint, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1964), p. 346; and Samiran Chandra Chakrabarti, *The Paribhasas in the Srautasutras* (Calcutta: Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar, 1980), pp. 131-134.

4. Louis Renou, "Les connexions entre le rituel et la grammaire en sanskrit, " *Journal Asiatique* 233 (1941-1942): 143-

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144, reprinted in *A Reader on the Sanskrit Grammarians*, edited by J. F. Staal (Cambridge, Mass. : MIT Press, 1972), p. 457 (translation mine).

5. See Mimamsa-Sutra 1. 1. 10. A similar use of the term occurs in Nyaya-Sutra 2. 2. 41 and 2. 2. 54, where the term *prakrti* is used to refer to the nonmodified form of Sanskrit letters.

6. We find an association of *prakrti* with some notion of materiality in the Vaisesika-Sutras, the foundational text of Vaisesika philosophy, where in sutra 8. 2. 5 earth (*prthivi*) is cited as the material basis or material cause (*prakrti*) of smell, but the association here is limited in its sense and application and does not seem to have any larger philosophical or cosmological force.

7. Renou, "Les connexions, " pp. 456-457.

8. Gerald J. Larson, *Classical Samkhya*, 2d ed. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1979), p. 75.

9. Ibid. , p. 76.

10. Ibid. , p. 95.

11. This section is selective and will focus only on passages and motifs that are immediately relevant to the project at hand. Readers interested in a fuller historical treatment are referred to Larson's *Classical Samkhya* and E. H. Johnston's *Early Samkhya: An Essay on Its Historical Development According to the Texts* (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1937).

12. See chapter one, pp. 27-28, 45.

13. Taittiriya Upanisad 2. 1.

14. Chandogya Upanisad 6. 6. 4-5.

15. See also Larson, *Classical Samkhya*, pp. 30, 83-84.

16. Note also that Viraj is identified with food in the Brahmanas.

17. See also Larson, *Classical Samkhya*, pp. 83-86. Larson notes that there are also passages in the Atharva-Veda that may be sources for the later *guna* theory, but the passages that he cites are quite obscure.

18. The Chandogya Upanisad probably dates from around 800-600 B. C. E. , whereas the Svetasvatara dates around 400 years later (400-200 B. C. E.). See Gerald J. Larson and Ram Shankar Bhattacharya, eds. , *Samkhya: A Dualist Tradition in Indian Philosophies*, vol. 4 of *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1987), p. 14.

19. Svetasvatara Upanisad 4. 5. See also Larson, *Classical Samkhya*, pp. 84-85.
20. Svetasvatara Upanisad 4. 5-6. The reference to the image of the two birds is clearly inspired by Rg-Veda 1. 164. 20, which presents the same image of two birds.
21. Maitri Upanisad 6. 10.
22. In his translation of this Upanisad, Robert E. Hume interprets "from this" (*asmat*) as meaning "from Brahman, " and "the other" (*anya*) as referring to the individual soul. See Robert E. Hume, trans. , *The Thirteen Principal Upanisads*, 2d ed. , 4th impression (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 404.
23. Svetasvatara Upanisad 1. 10.
24. Svetasvatara Upanisad 1. 8-9.
25. See also Larson, *Classical Samkhya*, pp. 113-114.
26. The evolution of the term *prakṛti* within the context of the development of proto-Samkhya materials in not only the Moksadharma and Bhagavad-Gita sections of the Mahabharata but also the *Caraka* and *Susruta Samhitas* and the *Buddhacarita* of Asvaghosa, has been covered extensively elsewhere. See, for example, Larson, *Classical Samkhya*, especially pp. 103ff. , and "Part One: Introduction to the Philosophy of Samkhya, " in Larson and Bhattacharya, *Samkhya*, pp. 7-15; Surendranath Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy*, 5 vols. (1922; reprint, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1988), vol. 1, pp. 213ff. , vol. 2, pp. 428-29. We will not attempt to reproduce here in any great detail the work of these other scholars but will rather focus on materials that are immediately relevant to the present discussion.
27. All numbers refer to the passages in the Sanskrit critical edition. Unfortunately, the best complete available translation of the Mahabharata, that of Pratap Chandra Roy, is based not on the critical edition but on the Bombay edition of the text. See Roy's *The Mahabharata of Krishna-Dwaipayana Vyasa*, 2d ed. , 12 vols. (Calcutta: Oriental Publishing Co. , 1883-1896). The passage cited is found in section 4 of Roy's translation.
28. Section 5 in Roy's translation.
29. Erich Frauwallner notes that the Mahabharata adheres to a theory of evolution of the five elements that he calls the Accumulation Theory, according to which "every element possesses, besides its own special quality, still the total qualities of the forego-

- ing element out of which it has sprung. " See Frauwallner, *History of Indian Philosophy*, vol. 1, pp. 96-97. References to the five gross elements are found already in two of the early Upanisads, the Tattiriya (2. 1) and the Aitareya (3. 5. 3). See Larson, *Classical Samkhya*, p. 90.
30. Section 183 in Roy's translation.
31. Section 202 in Roy's translation.
32. Section 233 in Roy's translation.
33. Literally, attain the state of earthness (*bhūmitvamupayanti*).
34. Section 340 in Roy's translation.
35. Section 343 in Roy's translation.
36. Whenever the name of a principle is used as an epithet of a divinity, I capitalize it. Thus I capitalize the term *purusa*

here because it is an epithet of Hari (Visnu).

37. See chapter one, p. 26.

38. Section 187 in Roy's translation.

39. Section 304 in Roy's translation.

40. Section 306 in Roy's translation.

41. 12. 206. 7-8 (section 213 in Roy's translation).

42. Surendranath Dasgupta equates the *mahat brahman* with *prakrti*. See Dasgupta, *History of Indian Philosophy*, vol. 2, p. 162.

43. Ibid. , p. 463.

44. Bhagavad-Gita 7. 5.

45. See also Coburn, *Devi-Mahatmya*, p. 184.

46. Larson, *Classical Samkhya*, pp. 10-13.

47. See Larson and Bhattacharya, *Samkhya*, p. 49.

48. Larson, *Classical Samkhya*, p. 11.

49. Samkhya-Karika 8. See also ibid. , p. 164.

50. Italics are mine. I have followed Larson's translation of this passage fairly closely (ibid. , pp. 260-261).

51. Samkhya-Karika 19.

52. Samkhya-Karika 20. See also Larson, *Classical Samkhya*, pp. 173-175.

53. Samkhya-Karika 59. See also Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya, *Lokayata: A Study in Ancient Indian Materialism* (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1959), pp. 61-62.

54. J. Gonda, *Change and Continuity in Indian Religion*, Disputationes Rheno-Trajectinae, vol. 9 (The Hague: Mouton, 1965), p. 166.

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55. Gonda, "'Original' Sense and the Etymology of Skt. *maya*," pp. 119-194.

56. Teun Goudriaan, *Maya Divine and Human* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1978), p. 2. For a discussion of various scholars' interpretations of the meaning of *maya* in the early tradition, see L. Thomas O'Neil, *Maya in Sankara: Measuring the Immeasurable* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1980), pp. 29-39.

57. Goudriaan, *Maya*, pp. 2-3.

58. Ibid. , p. 4.

59. For discussion and references, see Paul David Devanandan, *The Concept of Maya* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1950), pp. 20-21.

60. Prasna Upanisad 1. 15-16.

61. *Brahma-Sutra Bhasya* 1. 1. 12. See also 3. 2. 11.

62. See, for example, *Brahma-Sutra Bhasya* 1. 1. 12-15, 3. 2. 11-21. See also Karl H. Potter, ed. , *Advaita Vedanta up to*

Sankara and His Pupils, vol. 3 of *The Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies* (Princeton, N. J. : Princeton University Press, 1981), p. 74.

63. *Brahma-Sutra Bhasya* 1. 1. 12.

64. See, for example, *Brahma-Sutra Bhasya* 1. 1. 12, 3. 2. 11-15. See also Eliot Deutsch, *Advaita Vedanta: A Philosophical Reconstruction* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1969), p. 12.

65. *Brahma-Sutra Bhasya* 2. 1. 33.

66. See, for example, *Brahma-Sutra Bhasya* 3. 2. 21, as well as the introduction (*upodghata*).

67. *Brahma-Sutra Bhasya* 2. 1. 14.

68. *Brahma-Sutra Bhasya* 1. 1. 20. See also 3. 2. 17.

69. See Devanandan, *Concept of Maya*, p. 107.

70. Devanandan (*ibid.* , p. 103) summarizes his own and other scholars' views regarding this point:

Sankara uses the term [*sic*] *Avidya* and *Maya* indiscriminately, and it is difficult to see just how he distinguished the two. Not only does he use them interchangeably, he attributes to *Avidya* the same functions which he ascribes to *Maya*. Thibaut concludes that Sankara identifies them both. Deussen holds that to Sankara *Avidya* is the causal principle of the world of appearance while *Maya* is the effect, the appearance itself. It is true that later Vedantins [*sic*] of the school of Sankara make some distinction; in Sankara's own thinking, however, *Maya* is both a principle of creation as well as the creation itself. But it

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is *Maya* as a principle of creation that is obviously identified with *Avidya*. Radhakrishnan offers another interpretation. "*Avidya* and *Maya*," says he, "represent the subjective and the objective sides of the one fundamental fact of experience. It is called *avidya*, since it is dissolvable by knowledge; but the objective series is called *maya*, since it is coeternal with the supreme personality. "

71. *Brahma-Sutra Bhasya* 1. 4. 3. See also 2. 2. 2.

72. *Brahma-Sutra Bhasya* 1. 4. 1-7.

73. See page 68.

74. *Brahma-Sutra Bhasya* 1. 4. 9.

75. *Brahma-Sutra Bhasya* 1. 4. 10.

76. Dasgupta, *History of Indian Philosophy*, vol. 1, p. 418.

77. *Brahma-Sutra* 3. 2. 3.

78. See Chandradhar Sharma, *A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1987), chapters six, fourteen, and fifteen.

79. Coburn, *Devi-Mahatmya*, pp. 148-149.

80. See chapter one, pp. 47-53. The cosmogonic implications of the union of Indra/Indrani are described in Satapatha Brahmana 10. 5. 2. 9-12.

81. See Svetasvatara Upanisad 6. 8, where God's *sakti* is also described as various (*vividha*).

82. See also Das, *Sakti or Divine Power*, p. 49.

83. Svetasvatara Upanisad 1. 4-6. The term *preritr* probably refers to God himself.

84. See Hume, *Thirteen Principal Upanisads*, pp. 394-395; and S. Radhakrishnan, *The Principal Upanisads* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1953), pp. 711-713.

85. See also the argument presented by Coburn in *Devi-Mahatmya*, pp. 150-151. I disagree with Coburn, who argues that the identification of *sakti* and *prakrti* is implicit in this passage.

86. As Das remarks, in the Svetasvatara Upanisad we find for the first time the notion of an absolute God, designated sometimes by the generic term *deva* but also construed in personal terms as Isvara, who is associated with a *sakti* belonging to him alone as his own power. See Das, *Sakti or Divine Power*, p. 57.

87. For a discussion of the doctrine of *sakti* in Mimamsa and Nyaya, see Prabhat Chandra Chakravarti, *Doctrine of Sakti in Indian*

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Literature (Patna: Eastern Book House, 1940), pp. 34-44.

88. See Dasgupta, *History of Indian Philosophy*, vol. 1, pp. 279-280, 305; and Sharma, *Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy*, p. 175. Dasgupta locates the Vaisesika-Sutras before Caraka, whom he dates in the first century, since Caraka "not only quotes one of the *Vaisesika sutras*, but the whole foundation of his medical physics is based on the Vaisesika physics. " He believes that the sutras are probably pre-Buddhistic. Sharma asserts that the Vaisesika system is "certainly not later than Buddhism and Jainism. "

89. Vaisesika-Sutra 1. 1. 2-4.

90. Vaisesika-Sutra 5. 1. 15, 5. 2. 2, 5. 2. 7, 5. 2. 17.

91. Vaisesika-Sutra 5. 2. 18. See also Dasgupta, *History of Indian Philosophy*, vol. 1, pp. 283, 292. Dasgupta observes that the categories that are unexplained by known experience are attributed to *adrsta* and constitute "the acts on which depend all life-processes of animals and plants, the continuation of atoms or the construction of the worlds, natural motion of fire and air, death and rebirth. " Commenting on this particular passage, he observes that "with the absence of *adrsta* there is no contact of body with soul, and thus there is no rebirth, and therefore moksa (salvation). "

92. Vaisesika-Sutra 6. 2. 2.

93. Vaisesika-Sutra 10. 2. 8. See also Dasgupta, *History of Indian Philosophy*, vol. 1, pp. 282-283.

94. For a discussion of the place of cosmogonic elements in early Vaisesika, see Frauwallner, *History of Indian Philosophy*, vol. 2, pp. 61-64; and Nandalal Sinha, trans., *The Vaisesika Sutras of Kanada [with the commentary of Sankara Misra and extracts from the gloss of Jayanarayana, together with notes from the commentary of Candrakanta and an introduction by the translator]* (Delhi: S. N. Publications, 1986), pp. xxx-xxxiii. In later Nyaya-Vaisesika, the cosmogonic import of the *adrsta* is clearly designated in the work of Prasastapada (ca. sixth century). For discussion of such later formulations, see Dasgupta, *History of Indian Philosophy*, vol. 1, pp. 323-325; and Frauwallner, *History of Indian Philosophy*, vol. 2, pp. 146-147.

95. *Slokavarttika*, *Codanasutra* 199.

96. *Slokavarttika*, *Sunyavada* 249-254.

97. See, for example, *Slokavarttika*, *Vanavada* 86 and *Sambandhaksepaparihara* 11. See also Das, *Sakti or Divine Power*, pp. 227-228.

98. See Ganganatha Jha, *Purva-Mimamsa in Its Sources*, 2d ed.

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(Varanasi: Banaras Hindu University, 1964), p. 55; and A. B. Keith, *The Karma-Mimamsa* (Calcutta: Association Press, 1921), pp. 52, 55.

99. Yoga-Sutra 4. 34.

100. There has been much scholarly analysis of the notion of *maya* as *sakti* in Sankara's thought, and I will not attempt to reproduce such discussion here. For a good summary, see chapter five, "The Maya Vada in Sankara, " in Devanandan, *Concept of Maya*; and "Sakti in Different Schools of Vedanta, " in Chakravarti, *Doctrine of Sakti in Indian Literature*. See also O'Neil, *Maya in Sankara*.

101. See Gerald J. Larson, "The Sources for *Sakti* in Abhinavagupta's Kashmir Saivism: A Linguistic and Aesthetic Category, " *Philosophy East and West* 24, no. 1 (January 1974): 48. As Larson notes, the meaning of any phrase in Sanskrit is expressed by the inflection of the words, since syntax has very little importance in the construction of sentences or phrases.

102. *Vakyapadiya* 1. 1. See also Gaurinath Sastri, *The Philosophy of Word and Meaning* (1959: reprint, Calcutta: Sanskrit College, 1983), p. 20.

103. *Vakyapadiya* 1. 2. See also Sastri, *Philosophy of Word and Meaning*, pp. 15-16.

104. *Vakyapadiya* 1. 3. See also Sastri, *Philosophy of Word and Meaning*, pp. 28-29.

105. *Vakyapadiya* 1. 44ff. and 2. 31; and Sastri, *Philosophy of Word and Meaning*, pp. 66-67.

106. *Vakyapadiya* 1. 142. There is some variation on the numbering of this verse in the various editions of the *Vakyapadiya*, and it is sometimes listed as 1. 143.

107. *Vrtti* on 1. 142 (143). The *vrtti* is usually attributed to Bhartrahari himself, although there is some disagreement about this. For a discussion of the various positions and arguments regarding the authorship of the *vrtti*, see K. A. Subramania Iyer, trans. , *The Vakyapadiya of Bhartrhari with the Vrtti, Chapter I* (Poona: Deccan College Postgraduate and Research Institute, 1965), pp. xvi-xxvii.

108. See also Harold G. Coward, *Bhartrhari* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1976), pp. 47-48.

109. Besides those studies mentioned in notes above or below, see also, for example, Douglas Renfrew Brooks, *The Secret of the Three*

Cities: An Introduction to Hindu Sakta Tantrism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); Mark S. G. Dyczkowski, *The Aphorisms of Siva: The Siva Sutra with Bhaskara's Commentary, the Varttika* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992) and *The Doctrine of Vibration: An Analysis of the Doctrines and Practices of Kashmir Shaivism* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1989); and Paul Muller-Ortega, *The Triadic Heart of Siva* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989).

110. Sanjukta Gupta, Dirk Jan Hoens, and Teun Goudriaan, *Hindu Tantrism* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1979), p. 17.

111. See Padoux, *Vac*, pp. 23-24.

112. Gupta and Goudriaan, *Hindu Tantric and Sakta Literature*, p. 9.

113. Ernest A. Payne, *The Saktas: An Introductory and Comparative Study* (1933; reprint, New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc. , 1979), p. 72.

114. See Padoux, *Vac*, pp. 45-46.

115. Laksmi Tantra 11. 1-2.

116. Laksmi Tantra 31. 77.

117. See, for example, *Laksmi Tantra* 4. 5, 14. 3, 18. 20.

118. *Laksmi Tantra* 21. 4-6. In her translation of this text, Sanjukta Gupta indicates that the *kalas* are the six divine attributes of Visnu-Narayana: knowledge (*jñāna*), sovereignty (*aisvarya*), power (*śakti*), strength (*bala*), virility (*virya*), and energy (*tejas*). See Sanjukta Gupta, trans. , *Laksmi Tantra: A Pañcaratra Text* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1972), pp. 114-115, n. 2. For further discussion of creation according to Pañcaratra, see also Gupta's 'The Pañcaratra Attitude to Mantra,' in *Understanding Mantras*, edited by Harvey P. Alper (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), pp. 224-248, especially pp. 224-225, 228-229; and F. Otto Schrader, *Introduction to the Pañcaratra and the Ahirbudhnya Samhita*, 2d ed. (Madras: The Adyar Library and Research Centre, 1973).

119. *Laksmi Tantra* 18. 19ff.

120. *Paratrsika-Vivarana* of Abhinavagupta, p. 29 of the Sanskrit text given in *Paratrsika-vivarana: The Secret of Tantric Mysticism*, edited by Bettina Bäumer, translated by Jaideva Singh, Abhinavagupta's Sanskrit text edited by Swami Lakshmanjee (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1988). This book has also been published in identical form in the United States as *A Trident of Wisdom* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989). I have followed fairly closely

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Singh's translation (p. 77 of the English translation).

121. *Paratrsika-Vivarana*, pp. 29-30 of the Sanskrit text (pp. 7780 of Singh's translation). See also pp. 3-4 (pp. 8-12 of Singh's translation).

122. See also Padoux, *Vac*, especially pp. 78-80.

Chapter Three. The Feminine Principle in Puranic Cosmogony and Cosmology

1. Mahabharata, Salya-Parvan 41. 31 and Harivamsa 2. 3. 13, 18.

2. Evidence of this kind of tradition appears in the Harivamsa and especially in the Devi-Mahatmya, which is usually dated around the sixth century.

3. Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses*, p. 132.

4. I am borrowing the metaphor of crystallization from Thomas Coburn, who has subtitled his first study of the Devi-Mahatmya "the crystallization of the Goddess tradition. "

For the dates of the various Puranas, see Rocher, *The Puranas*. Rocher summarizes various scholars' arguments concerning the dating of the Puranic literature, and the dates that I give are generally derived from Rocher's discussions, unless otherwise noted. It must be said that many of the Puranas cannot be dated with any precision; many appear to have been compiled slowly over the course of many centuries, and the age of several of the Puranas is greatly contested.

5. In Coburn's study of the Devi-Mahatmya, he examines all the epithets used to describe the Goddess. He notes that the term *mahamaya* occurs seven times, *prakṛti* three times, and *śakti*, four times. For his remarks on these three epithets of the Goddess, see his *Devi-Mahatmya*, pp. 123-127, 180-186, 146-153.

The best available translation of the Devi-Mahatmya is Thomas Coburn's translation found in his book *Encountering the Goddess: A Translation of the Dev-Mahatmya and a Study of Its Interpretation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), pp. 32-84.

6. Devi-Mahatmya 1. 48 (1. 66).

7. Devi-Mahatmya 1. 49-78 (1. 67-104). This story first appears in the Mahabharata, where it is told from a Vaisnava perspective. For a history of this story, see Coburn, *Devi-Mahatmya*, pp. 211-221. See also Veena Das, 'The Goddess and the Demon-An

Analysis of the Devi Mahatmya, " *Manushi*, no. 30 (1985): 30. The story is also repeated with some variations in other Puranas, including the Siva Purana, Uma-Samhita 45. 47-69, recounted below, and the Devi-Bhagavata Purana, I. 6-7. For a comparison of the versions in the Devi-Mahatmya and the Devi-Bhagavata as well as a detailed discussion of the myth, see Brown, *Triumph of the Goddess*, pp. 83-94.

Both Brown and Coburn discuss at greater length this story as well as the two other main stories of her exploits her victory over the demon Mahisa and her defeat of Sumbha and Nisumbha. See Brown, *Triumph of the Goddess*, pp. 81-131; and Coburn, *Devi-Mahatmya*, pp. 209-241, and *Encountering the Goddess*, pp. 22-24.

8. Devi-Mahatmya 2. 1-12 (2. 1-13). This story reappears in variable form in several other Puranas as well.

9. Devi-Mahatmya 11. 3-4 (11. 4-5).

10. Throughout this chapter, I capitalize the names of cosmic principles, such as *prakṛti*, *maya*, *mahamaya*, *śakti*, and so forth, when they are used as epithets of the Great Goddess and designate her status as an independent, supreme goddess. Similarly, I capitalize *purusa* when it is used as an epithet of the god identified as Brahman.

11. See, for example, Devi-Mahatmya 1. 47 (1. 64), 4. 6 (4. 7).

12. Devi-Mahatmya 11. 10 (11. 11).

13. Devi-Mahatmya 5. 18 (5. 32-34), 1. 63 (1. 82).

14. Thomas Coburn, "Consort of None, *Śakti* of All: The Vision of the *Devi-Mahatmya*," in *The Divine Consort: Radha and the Goddesses of India*, edited by John S. Hawley and Donna Marie Wulff (Berkeley: Berkeley Religious Studies Series, 1982; reprint, Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), p. 160.

15. Devi-Mahatmya 1. 42-43 (1. 55-56).

16. See Coburn, "Consort of None," pp. 155-156.

17. Devi-Mahatmya 1. 59 (1. 78). See also Coburn, "Consort of None," p. 156.

18. Coburn, *Encountering the Goddess*, p. 16.

19. Manu-Smṛti 1. 5-13. See Holdrege, *Veda and Torah*, ms. pp. 85-86.

20. Matsya Purana 2. 25-32. The dates that I give for this Purana are those proposed by P. V. Kane, but other scholars propose dates ranging from the fourth century B. C. E. to 1250 C. E.

See Rocher, *The Puranas*, p. 199.

21. See Holdrege, *Veda and Torah*, ms. pp. 111-115.

22. There is some dispute in the Puranas themselves with respect to exactly which texts should be included in which list. The main disagreement concerns whether the Siva Purana should be included as a Maha-Purana replacing the Vayu Purana or whether it should be classified as an Upa-Purana. If we include both, the result is a list of nineteen Puranas: Agni, Bhagavata, Bhavisiya, Brahma, Brahmanda, Brahmavaivarta, Garuda, Kurma, Linga, Markandeya, Matsya, Narada, Padma, Skanda, Siva, Vamana, Varaha, Vayu, and Visnu.

23. The dates that I give for this Purana are those proposed by P. V. Kane, but other scholars propose dates ranging from 700 B. C. E. to ca. 1045 C. E. See Rocher, *The Puranas*, p. 249.

24. See, for example, Visnu Purana, 1. 3. Such time calculations are found in most of the Puranas, with some variation in

the length of the individual *yugas*.

25. Brown, *Triumph of the Goddess*, pp. 7-8. Brown is not alone in his frustrations. Many of the Puranas cannot be dated with any real precision. Scholars disagree about when they were recorded, and much of the material found in these texts remained oral for a long time before it was written down. It is thus difficult to determine the relative age of the various texts.

26. The dates that I give for this Purana are those proposed by P. V. Kane, but other scholars propose dates ranging from the fourth century B. C. E. to 1000 C. E. See Rocher, *The Puranas*, p. 157.

27. These are the dates proposed by R. C. Hazra, *Studies in the Puranic Record on Hindu Rites and Customs*, 2d ed. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1975), p. 144. Hazra also notes that the Uttara Khanda is a later addition. See also Rocher, *The Puranas*, p. 177. The Garuda Purana appears to have been compiled over a long period of time in several stages. Many scholars have proposed that the date of the text as a whole cannot be fixed. Rather, they have dated different sections of the text separately, ranging from the first century C. E. up to the eleventh century.

28. Although the Devi-Bhagavata is generally held to be an Upa-Purana and is not included in most lists of the Maha-Puranas, I nevertheless include it in my analysis because of its importance in the Sakta tradition. Furthermore, Brown has argued in his

introduction to *Triumph of the Goddess* that the status of the DeviBhagavata is actually somewhat open to discussion (see especially pp. 5-6, 17-24). In this book, Brown also shows that the DeviBhagavata is heavily influenced by the Devi-Mahatmya, the Brahmavaivarta Purana, and the Bhagavata Purana, all of which are included in the standard list of Maha-Puranas. The form and content of the Devi-Bhagavata are thus shaped substantially by the Maha-Puranic tradition.

29. For an extensive discussion of the relationship between the Devi-Mahatmya and the Devi-Bhagavata Purana, see Brown, *Triumph of the Goddess*, especially pp. 81-176.

30. Madeleine Biardeau, *Cosmogonies Puraniques*, Etudes de Mythologie Hindoue, tome I (Paris: École Française D'Extreme Orient, 1981), pp. 14-24. See also Greg Bailey, *The Mythology of Brahma* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 85-103.

31. "[L]es deux entités sont très exactement complémentaires . . . et ne peuvent être pensées l'une sans l'autre. " See *Cosmogonies Puraniques*, p. 14.

32. Ibid. Biardeau gives the following list:

Pradhana	Purusa
Brahman	Brahma
Prakrti	Svayambhu
	Isvara
	Narayana
Avyakta	Vyaktavyakta
Jagadyoni	Jaganmaya
Sadasadatmaka	Sthulasuksmatman
Sadasatpara	Ekanekasvarupa
	Srjya, Sargakartr

33. See, for example, Visnu Purana 1. 2. 29-49; Brahma Purana 1. 34-36; and Vayu Purana 4. 15-61. Biardeau discusses the evolution of the *tattvas* in fair detail. See Biardeau, *Cosmogonies Puraniques*, pp. 16-24.

34. See, for example, Brahmanda Purana 1. 1. 3. 13.

35. Brahma Purana 1. 34, 1. 38-39.

36. Markandeya Purana 46. 9.

37. Visnu Purana 1. 2. 21; Markandeya Purana 46. 12.

38. See Daniel P. Sheridan, *The Advaitic Theism of the Bhagavata Purana* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1986), especially chapter two.

39. Bhagavata Purana 2. 5. 4-5.

40. Bhagavata Purana 1. 3. 30-31.

41. The description of *maya* as having three *gunas* is found elsewhere in the text as well. See, for example, 2. 5. 18, 3. 5. 26, and 11. 6. 8. As discussed in chapter two, the description of *maya* as possessed of three *gunas* is also found in Bhagavad-Gita 7. 14.

42. Bhagavata Purana 3. 5. 23-27.

43. See Sheridan, *Advaitic Theism*, pp. 31-35. Sheridan emphasizes that the term *maya* is used in the Bhagavata Purana to indicate the creative power of Bhagavan. The term *sakti* is also used to designate this creative power. The association of Visnu/ Bhagavan with a fundamental energy that is the source of creation is found throughout the text. See, for example, 2. 5. 5, "You create all beings . . . having taken hold of your own power (*atmasakti*)"; and 8. 1. 13, "By means of his own power (*atmasakti*), which is uncreated, he brings about the creation, and so forth (*janmadi*) of the world. "

44. Bhagavata Purana 3. 5. 28-29.

45. See, for example, Bhagavata Purana 2. 9. 33.

46. In terms of the major schools of Vedanta philosophy, this position of both identity and difference represents the position of the school of Visistadvaita Vedanta, the prime exponent of which is Ramanuja. It should also be said that Ramanuja takes the theistic tendency found in the narrative Brahmanical tradition more seriously than do other philosophers and attempts to reconcile philosophical absolutism with personal theism.

47. Kurma Purana 2. 3. 1-15.

48. Kurma Purana 2. 3. 21-22.

49. Kurma Purana 2. 4. 18-19.

50. Kurma Purana 2. 4. 20-23.

51. Kurma Purana 2. 6. 5-9, 51.

52. See also Bailey, *Mythology of Brahma*, pp. 103-121; and Biardeau, *Cosmogonies Puraniques*, pp. 44-90.

53. See, for example, Agni Purana 17. 9-10; Brahma Purana 1. 40-42; Matsya Purana 2. 28-32; Visnu Purana 1. 2. 50ff.

54. See, for example, Brahmanda Purana 1. 1. 5. 1-28; Vayu Purana 6. 6-32; Padma Purana 1. 3. 25-56; Visnu Purana 1.

and 45-52; Markandeya Purana 47. 6-14.

55. Visnu Purana 1. 4. 7-8.

56. Visnu Purana 1. 4. 11-52.

57. Bhagavata Purana 3. 8. 10-3. 10. 9.

58. See, for example, Brahmanda Purana 1. 1. 5. 29-58; Vayu Purana 6. 38-60; Padma Purana 1. 3. 61-82; Visnu Purana 1. 5. 1-26.

59. Although it is not explicitly stated that the *kaumara* creation consists of the mind-born progeny of Brahma, this does in fact seem to be the case. Biardeau also believes that this is probably so. See Biardeau, *Cosmogonies Puraniques*, p. 48. See also Mahabharata 12. 176. 2-16, quoted on pp. 76-77, where the creator Manasa is said to create by means of his mind.

60. See, for example, Vayu Purana 9. 2-22; Brahmanda Purana 1. 2. 8. 2-30; Padma Purana 1. 3. 84-97; Visnu Purana 1. 5. 28-67.

61. Brahma Purana 1. 52-53.

62. See, for example, Brahmanda Purana 1. 2. 9. 31-36.

63. Visnu Purana 1. 7. 9-13. See also Markandeya Purana 50. 4-10; Padma Purana 1. 3. 172-173.

64. See, for example, Visnu Purana 1. 7. 14-17; Markandeya Purana 50. 11-15; Padma Purana 1. 3. 174-179.

65. Matsya Purana 3. 30-32.

66. Matsya Purana 3. 33-35.

67. Matsya Purana 3. 43-47.

68. Padma Purana 1. 6. 2.

69. Brahma Purana 1. 56-59.

70. Brahma Purana 1. 99-107. See also Brahmanda Purana 1. 2. 9. 37-38; Vayu Purana 10. 12-13.

71. Brahmanda Purana 1. 2. 9. 14-15, 32-33.

72. Vayu Purana 9. 75-85.

73. Brahma Purana 34. 24-25.

74. Bhagavata Purana 6. 19. 11-13.

75. Kurma Purana 1. 1. 34-38.

76. Kurma Purana 1. 1. 57-58.

77. Kurma Purana 1. 2. 7-10.

78. Kurma Purana 1. 4. 5ff.

79. These are the dates proposed by Hazra, who dates different chapters and sections of the Purana separately. He argues that this section, the "Trisakti-Mahatmya, " is quite late but not later than 1400 C. E. See Hazra, *Studies in the Puranic*

all scholars agree with Hazra. In his own discussion of this passage, for example, Brown gives various scholars' views on its age and acknowledges the dates given by Hazra, but he himself dates this section no later than the ninth century C. E. See Brown, *Triumph of the Goddess*, pp. 135-136, 268, n. 21.

80. Varaha Purana 89. 3-28 in the Sanskrit edition, 90. 3-28 in *Varaha Purana*, translated by S. V. Iyer, Ancient Indian Tradition and Mythology Series, vols. 31-32 (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1985). For this Purana, the numbering of passages in the English translation deviates slightly from the numbering given in the critical Sanskrit edition. I provide first the reference for the passage in the Sanskrit text and then, in parentheses, the corresponding passage in the translation.

81. Varaha Purana 89. 27-29 (90. 29-32).

82. Varaha Purana 90. 1-12 (91. 1-12).

83. Varaha Purana 95. 59-61 (96. 63-65).

84. Varaha Purana 94. 57 (95. 62), (144. 47). The identification of the Vaisnavi *sakti* as Mahamaya, the mother of the universe (*jaganmatr*), Prakrti, and Pradhana is quoted in the translation in 144. 47 but does not appear in the text of the critical edition. It is, however, cited on page 803 of the critical edition as a variant found in the printed Venkatesvara edition of the Varaha Purana (Bombay: Venkatesvara Press, 1929).

85. Varaha Purana 89. 34-36 (90. 37-39).

86. Varaha Purana 89. 37-41 (90. 40-45).

87. Varaha Purana 21. 5-6 in both the Sanskrit edition and the translation.

88. Varaha Purana 21. 2-13 in both the Sanskrit edition and the translation.

89. The six *gunas* are: *jnana* (knowledge), *aisvarya* (lordship), *sakti* (power), *bala* (strength), *virya* (virility or energy), and *tejas* (splendor). For more on the six *gunas*, see Schrader, *Introduction to the Pañcaratra*, pp. 37-39.

90. Garuda Purana 3. 3. 12-14.

91. Garuda Purana 3. 3. 15-16.

92. Garuda Purana 3. 3. 19.

93. Garuda Purana 3. 3. 24-25.

94. Garuda Purana 3. 3. 25-26.

95. Garuda Purana 3. 3. 57-58. Cf. Bhagavata Purana 3. 5. 23-27

discussed above, pp. 133-134.

96. Garuda Purana 3. 4. 1-3. Sri is another name for Laksmi, and Bhu is the same as Prthivi, the goddess earth. See also 3. 11. 45 cited below, which states that *prakrti* assumes the forms of Laksmi and the earth (= Sri and Bhu).

97. Garuda Purana 3. 4. 4-6, 10-11. Note that the correlation of *gunas* and gods found here is different from that found in the Varaha Purana, where Brahma is associated with the sattvic goddess and Visnu is associated with the rajasic goddess.

98. Garuda Purana 3. 5. 1ff.
99. Garuda Purana 3. 11. 1-5.
100. Narada Purana, Purva-Khanda 3. 3-6.
101. Narada Purana, Purva-Khanda 3. 7-9.
102. Narada Purana, Purva-Khanda 3. 10-12.
103. Narada Purana, Purva-Khanda 3. 13-15. In his translation of this text, G. V. Tagare notes that "Although the *purana-writer* appears to give synonyms of *Vaisnavi sakti*, he is actually describing or summarizing the various aspects of this potency. Thus *Maya* emphasizes the illusive power, *Vidya*, the Spiritual Knowledge, *Avidya*, Nescience, *Para Prakrti*, the Supreme Primordial nature, and the *Saktis* of various gods like Brahmi, Aindri, etc. are given to emphasize that whatever feats these gods achieve are due to the motive force of Visnu. " See *The Narada Purana*, translated by G. V. Tagare, Ancient Indian Tradition and Mythology Series, vols. 15-19 (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1980-1982), vol. 15, p. 97, n. 4.
104. Narada Purana, Purva-Khanda 3. 27.
105. Narada Purana, Purva-Khanda 3. 28-32.
106. These sections appear to be late additions and might be dated after 1000 C. E. See Hazra, *Studies in the Puranic Records*, pp. 129-133.
107. Narada Purana, Uttara-Khanda 59. 2-9.
108. Narada Purana, Uttara-Khanda 59. 8.
109. Narada Purana, Purva-Khanda 83. 10-11, 83. 44, 82. 214.
110. Narada Purana, Purva-Khanda 83. 32.
111. Narada Purana, Purva-Khanda 83. 9-13, 16.
112. Narada Purana, Purva-Khanda 83. 13-28.
113. Narada Purana, Purva-Khanda 83. 17-18.
114. See, for example, Narada Purana, Purva-Khanda 83. 44-47.
115. Narada Purana, Uttara-Khanda 58. 45ff.

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116. Brahmavaivarta Purana, Prakrti-Khanda 1. 4-8.
117. Brahmavaivarta Purana, Prakrti-Khanda 2. 10.
118. C. Mackenzie Brown, *God as Mother: A Feminine Theology in India; An Historical and Theological Study of the Brahmavaivarta Purana* (Hartford, Vt. : Claude Stark and Co. , 1974), pp. 123-139. I have reversed the order to emphasize that in the first pair, the active pole of *prakrti/sakti* is emphasized, whereas in the other three, it is the material dimension that is emphasized.
119. Brown, *God as Mother*, pp. 128-129.
120. Brahmavaivarta Purana, Prakrti-Khanda 2. 74-76.
121. Brahmavaivarta Purana, Prakrti-Khanda 55. 86-87.

122. See Brown, *God as Mother*, pp. 130-132.
123. Brahmavaivarta Purana, Krsna-Janma-Khanda 6. 215-216. See also *ibid.* , pp. 132-133.
124. Brahmavaivarta Purana, Brahma-Khanda 28. 23-24. For a discussion of *nirguna* as an epithet of *prakrti*, see Brown, *God as Mother*, pp. 134-136.
125. See, for example, Brahmavaivarta Purana, Prakrti-Khanda 1. 12.
126. For a detailed discussion of the five forms of *prakrti* and the historical roots of this concept, see Brown, *God as Mother*, pp. 142-167.
127. Brown notes that sometimes not just women but all beings, both male and female, are said to be derived from Prakrti. He cites as an example Prakrti-Khanda 12. 14. See *ibid.* , p. 195.
128. *Ibid.* , p. 121. See also Prakrti-Khanda 55. 52, 65. 25-26.
129. Brahmavaivarta Purana, Prakrti-Khanda 54. 88-91.
130. Brahmavaivarta Purana, Prakrti-Khanda 55. 77.
131. Brahmavaivarta Purana, Brahma-Khanda 3. 1ff. , 5. 25-26.
132. Brahmavaivarta Purana, Brahma-Khanda 6. 56.
133. See Brown, *God as Mother*, chapter nine.
134. Brahmavaivarta Purana, Prakrti-Khanda 2. 27-29.
135. Brahmavaivarta Purana, Prakrti-Khanda 2. 30-32.
136. Brahmavaivarta Purana, Prakrti-Khanda 2. 33-53. See also Prakrti-Khanda 54. 112-117 and Ganesa-Khanda 45. 21ff. In this last passage, it is Durga who is equated with *prakrti*, and the account of Prakrti's division into five goddesses and the model of creation by copulation are conflated. After Krsna makes love to the goddess and various creations come into being, she then

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divides herself further into five goddesses.

137. Brahmavaivarta Purana, Prakrti-Khanda 3. 1-3.
138. Brahmavaivarta Purana, Prakrti-Khanda 3. 48ff. This passage resembles the above-discussed account of the *pratisarga* found in the Bhagavata Purana, where Brahma, who is identified as the second self of Visnu, dives into the waters hoping to find the ground from which the lotus has sprung. Failing to find the bottom of the cosmic ocean, he propitiates Visnu-Narayana.
139. Brown, *God as Mother*, pp. 140-141. See also Brown, *Triumph of the Goddess*, pp. ix-x.
140. Kurma Purana 1. 11. 2-6.
141. Kurma Purana 1. 11. 7-13.
142. Kurma Purana 1. 11. 22-30.
143. Kurma Purana 1. 11. 34-35.
144. Kurma Purana 1. 11. 42-47.
145. Kurma Purana 1. 11. 40-41.

146. Kurma Purana 1. 11. 224.

147. Kurma Purana 1. 11. 222.

148. Linga Purana 1. 3. 1-3.

149. Linga Purana 1. 3. 4-12.

150. Linga Purana 1. 3. 12-28. Cf. the discussion of Svetasvatara Upanisad 4. 5 in chapter two, p. 68. There is another account of creation in chapter seventy of the Purana that proposes a Samkhya-type cosmology without interpreting *prakṛti* as feminine.

151. Linga Purana 1. 16. 32-35.

152. Linga Purana 1. 87. 13.

153. Linga Purana 1. 5. 27-31.

154. Linga Purana 1. 41. 39-56.

155. Linga Purana 1. 70. 325-344.

156. Siva Purana, Rudra-Samhita 1. 6. 8-18.

157. Siva Purana, Rudra-Samhita 1. 6. 19-59.

158. Siva Purana, Uma-Samhita 45. 47-67. Although this account occurs in a Saiva Purana, it is Sakta in orientation, for the Goddess is extolled as the highest reality. Primordial Sakti is described as the great Brahman who alone creates, sustains, and destroys the universe. Thus it appears that she is conceived to be the supreme deity, higher than all other gods, including Siva. She is also said to be the material cause of creation, the great *maya* or Paramesvari having three *gunas*.

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159. Siva Purana, Vayaviya-Samhita 1. 16. 6-11.

160. Siva Purana, Rudra-Samhita 1. 9. 45-48.

161. Siva Purana, Rudra-Samhita 1. 16. 41-42: "Having become Sati, Siva was married by Siva. At her father's sacrifice, having cast off her body, which she did not take again, she went back to her own region. And Siva incarnated again as Parvati at the request of the *devas*. Having performed very severe austerities (*tapas*), she again attained Siva. "

162. Siva Purana, Rudra-Samhita 2. 24. 35 and 3. 6. 45.

163. Siva Purana, Vayaviya-Samhita 1. 16. 15-1. 17. 2.

164. Siva Purana, Vayaviya-Samhita 1. 16. 18-20.

165. Siva Purana, Vayaviya-Samhita 1. 17. 1-2.

166. As Brown notes in *Triumph of the Goddess* (pp. x, 10, 145-147, and *passim*), the ninth book of the Devi-Bhagavata Purana corresponds closely to the Prakṛti-Khanda of the Brahmavaivarta Purana, except that Devi replaces Visnu as supreme deity. Because the mythological material is substantially the same in both Puranas, we will not address this portion of the Devi-Bhagavata Purana.

167. See, for example, Devi-Bhagavata Purana 1. 2. 4-5, 1. 2. 8, 1. 2. 19.

168. See, for example, Devi-Bhagavata Purana 1. 2. 10, 1. 8. 40, 1. 12. 51, 3. 7. 4-7, 3. 25. 39, 12. 8. 75.

169. See, for example, Devi-Bhagavata Purana 1. 5. 48.

170. Devi-Bhagavata Purana 7. 29. 7, 12. 12. 12.

171. Devi-Bhagavata Purana 3. 3. 37-40. See also Brown's discussion of this passage in *Triumph of the Goddess*, pp. 206-212.

172. Devi-Bhagavata Purana 1. 5. 58-61.

173. Devi-Bhagavata Purana 1. 2. 19-20. See also 3. 24. 36-38. The correlation of *gunas* and goddesses parallels that of *gunas* and gods given in the Garuda Purana, where *sattva* is associated with Visnu (Laksmi's consort), *rajas* with Brahma (Sarasvati's consort), and *tamas* with Siva (Kali's consort). See the discussion of the Garuda Purana above.

C. Mackenzie Brown discusses this passage in relation to the "Trisakti-Mahatmya" of the Varaha Purana and two of the six "limbs" attached to the Devi-Mahatmya. See Brown, *Triumph of the Goddess*, pp. 136-142.

174. Devi-Bhagavata Purana 1. 2. 21-22. 1. 4. 46-48 associates the

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same three *saktis* with the same gods, and asserts that the male divinities would be unable to fulfill their functions without their *saktis*. See also 3. 30. 30, 3. 30. 34, and 5. 19. 2.

175. Devi-Bhagavata Purana 1. 2. 6-8.

176. 7. 32. 1-4. This chapter forms part of the Devi-Gita, which comprises chapters 31-40 of the seventh Skandha. Brown discusses the Devi-Gita at length in *Triumph of the Goddess*, pp. 179-200.

177. Devi-Bhagavata Purana 7. 32. 7, 7. 33. 1.

178. Devi-Bhagavata Purana 7. 32. 8. The term used, *samavayitva*, usually indicates an intimate or inherent relation existing between or among entities. The term *samavayikarana*, however, can indicate a material or substantial cause. In this context, the force of *samavayitva* is probably the same as that of *samavayikarana*.

179. Devi-Bhagavata Purana 7. 33. 1. See also 12. 8. 67.

180. Devi-Bhagavata Purana 7. 32. 42-43.

181. Devi-Bhagavata Purana 12. 8. 69-70.

182. Devi-Bhagavata Purana 3. 10. 15 and 3. 3. 51.

183. Devi-Bhagavata Purana 3. 5. 6, 12. 8. 76.

184. Devi-Bhagavata Purana 7. 33. 22-39. This description of the cosmos as the manifestation of the body of Brahman, here identified with the Goddess, parallels a similar description in Bhagavata Purana 2. 6. Since the Bhagavata Purana is Vaisnava in orientation, however, it identifies Brahman not as the Goddess but as Visnu-Narayana. For more on some of the materials shared by the two Bhagavatas, see Brown, *Triumph of the Goddess*, pp. 17-77.

Chapter Four. Concluding Remarks

1. Coburn, *Encountering the Goddess*, p. 172.

2. Kathleen Erndl, "The Goddess and Female Empowerment in Kangra, India, " paper read at the American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting, San Francisco, Calif. , November 21, 1992.

3. Cynthia Ann Humes, "Glorifying the Great Goddess or Great Woman? Interpretation of the *Devi-Mahatmya*, East and West, " paper read at the Biannual International East Meets West Conference, Long Beach, Calif. , April 9, 1993. See also Humes's article "Glorifying the Great Goddess or Great Woman? Hindu Women's Experience in Ritual Recitation of the *Devi-Mahatmya*, "

in *Women in Goddess Traditions*, edited by Karen King and Karen Torjesen (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, forthcoming).

4. Frederick M. Smith, "Indra's Curse, Varuna's Noose, " in *Roles and Rituals for Hindu Women*, edited by Julia Leslie (London: Pinter Publishers, 1991), p. 26.

5. William S. Sax, *Mountain Goddess: Gender and Politics in a Himalayan Pilgrimage* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

6. This point was made by Erndl in her paper (cited above) and also by Mary McGee in the discussion following her paper "Domesticated Shakti: Empowerment through Marriage" read at the American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting, November 21, 1992.

7. See also Brown, *Triumph of the Goddess*, pp. 215-218.

8. See Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses*, p. 144.

9. Kinsley, *Sword and the Flute*, p. 143.

10. Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses*, p. 144.

11. Linga Purana 1. 106. 20. See also Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses*, p. 118.

12. See Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses*, pp. 178-196. See also Diana L. Eck, "India's *Tirthas*: 'Crossings' in Sacred Geography, " *History of Religions* 20, no. 4 (May 1981): 323-344.

13. Wadley, "Women and the Hindu Tradition, " p. 117.

14. Sherry B. Ortner, "Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?" in *Women, Culture, and Society*, edited by Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere (Stanford, Calif. : Stanford University Press, 1974), pp. 73, 84.

15. It should also be noted that some *sakta* texts like the Devi-Bhagavata Purana offer a somewhat different interpretation of the Goddess's role in this regard, asserting that the Goddess offers both liberation from the world (*mukti*) and enjoyment of it (*bhukti*).

16. See also Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), pp. 94-96. Douglas notes that transitional states lie between states of order and, thus, represent disorder. Disorder, in turn, runs counter to culture, which depends on well-defined states of order. Because they threaten order, transitional states are both powerful and dangerous.

17. Veena Das, "Epilogue, " in *Structure and Cognition*, 2d ed. (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 143-144, cited in Frédérique A. Marglin, "Introduction, " in *Purity and Auspiciousness in Indian Society*, edited by John B. Carman and Frédérique A. Marglin (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1985), p. 4.

18. See T. N. Madan, "Concerning the Categories *Subha* and *Suddha* in Hindu Culture: An Exploratory Essay, " Vasudha Narayan, "The Two Levels of Auspiciousness in Srivaisnava Literature, " and Frédérique A. Marglin, "Types of Oppositions in Hindu Culture, " in *Purity and Auspiciousness in Indian Society*, pp. 24, 58, 7980.

19. Marglin, "Types of Oppositions in Hindu Culture, " pp. 80-81.

20. Lawrence A. Babb, *The Divine Hierarchy: Popular Hinduism in Central India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975), pp. 219-226.

21. David Shulman, *Tamil Temple Myths: Sacrifice and Divine Marriage in the South Indian Saiva Tradition* (Princeton, N. J. : Princeton University Press, 1980), pp. 212, 223-226; and Wadley, "Women and the Hindu Tradition, " pp. 118-119. Brown quotes both Babb and Shulman in his own discussion of this problem in *Triumph of the Goddess*, pp. 124ff.
 22. Sax, *Mountain Goddess*, pp. 31-32.
 23. Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *Women, Androgynes, and Other Mythical Beasts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), pp. 90-91.
 24. See Brown, *Triumph of the Goddess*, pp. 122-125.
 25. Stanley Kurtz, *All the Mothers Are One: Hindu India and the Cultural Reshaping of Psychoanalysis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), pp. 20-26, especially pp. 24-25.
 26. See also Wadley, "Women and the Hindu Tradition, " pp. 118-19.
 27. Manu-Smṛti 9. 15.
 28. I. Julia Leslie, *The Perfect Wife: The Orthodox Hindu Woman According to the Strīdharmapaddhati of Tryambakayajvan* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 248.
 29. Ibid. , p. 320.
 30. Sax, *Mountain Goddess*, p. 32.
 31. O'Flaherty, *Women*, pp. 53-55.
 32. See also Wadley, "Women and the Hindu Tradition, " p. 115.
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33. Ronald B. Inden and McKim Marriott, "Caste Systems," in *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica, Macropaedia*, 15th ed. , vol. 3, s. v. "Caste Systems, " p. 983b.
 34. Wadley, "Women and the Hindu Tradition, " pp. 117-119.
 35. Mary McGee, "Desired Fruits: Motive and Intention in the Votive Rites of Hindu Women, " in *Roles and Rituals for Hindu Women*, p. 78.
 36. Vanaja Dhruvarajan, *Hindu Women and the Power of Ideology* (Granby, Mass. : Bergin and Garvey Publishers, 1989), p. 41.
 37. Susan S. Wadley, "The Paradoxical Powers of Tamil Women, " in *The Powers of Tamil Women*, edited by Susan S. Wadley, Foreign and Comparative Studies/South Asian Series, no. 6 (Syracuse, N. Y. : Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University, 1980), p. 157.
 38. See Wadley, "Women and the Hindu Tradition, " pp. 122-123.
 39. The formulation of the mother as residing at the threshold of nature and culture is that of Julia Kristeva. See, for example, her article "Hérétique de l'amour, " *Tel Quel*, no. 74 (Winter 1977), reprinted as "Stabat Mater, " translated by Leon S. Roudiez, in *The Kristeva Reader*, edited by Toril Moi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986). See also Alison Ainley, "The Ethics of Sexual Difference, " in *Abjection, Melancholia and Love: The Work of Julia Kristeva*, edited by John Fletcher and Andrew Benjamin, Warwick Studies in Philosophy and Literature (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 58.
 40. Wadley, "Women and the Hindu Tradition, " p. 132.
 41. Ibid. , p. 134.

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